



ANTHONY DARE

By ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

The House of Merrilees
Richard Baldock
Exton Manor
The Squire's Daughter
The Eldest Son
The Honour of the Clintons
The Greatest of These
The Old Order Changeth
Watermeads
Upsidonia
Abington Abbey
The Graftons
The Clintons, and Others
Sir Harry
Many Junes
A Spring Walk in Provence
Peggy in Toyland
The Hall and the Grange
Peter Binney
Big Peter
Pippin
The Clinton Twins
Anthony Dare

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ARCHIBALD MARSHALL



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TO

J. HOWARD GLOVER

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ANTHONY DARE

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CHAPTER I

"SABRINA FAIR"

TONY leant back against the wall and gave himself up to luxurious reflection, which was a habit of his, even at the age of sixteen. There were so many things to think about, and most of them were pleasant things, especially in the middle of the summer term, with the School Field lying out there mown and rolled in all its green acres, and the trees that surrounded it waving their leafy plumes high in the sky. The School Field usually came first to his thoughts when he relaxed them from the work in hand, because he was particularly keen on cricket at this time, having a strong hope of his Third Eleven colours. With his easily worked imagination he could go through in his mind the actions of batting and bowling and fielding, and in such a way that if he could have carried them out in practice he need have had no anxiety about the Third Eleven of Hilbury School, for he would certainly have been asked sooner or later to play for All England.

But the School Field was only one of the many pictures with which he filled his mind at such times as this, when there was preparation going on for a lesson to be heard later. On this happy June morning, in the last hour of

school, with Saturday afternoon and the whole of Sunday stretching in illimitable freedom in front of him, it was, unusually enough, the lesson itself upon which he first reflected.

It was an English lesson. The Upper Fifth was attacking Milton's "Comus," in much the same spirit as that in which they were accustomed to attack Horace or Xenophon, with careful attention to the construction of sentences and to all classical allusions, and with small reference to whatever poetic beauty the author might have imparted to his subject. This, however, was just what Anthony was considering for himself, with a sense of pleasure akin to that with which he turned over in his mind other satisfactions.

Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting,
Under the glassy cool translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair.

How jolly it was! He said it over to himself again, with a keen sense of the beauty of the lines, and a virtuous eye fixed upon Mr. Broadbent, sitting on his dais immediately in front of him, who, if he happened to look up and see his lips moving, would not know that he was not memorizing the fact that Sabrina was a personification of the River Severn, or the derivation of the word "translucent."

The importance of the latter question, which he had overlooked, was brought to his notice by Stephen Hawthorne, who sat next to him, whispering: "Is it *lucëre* or *lucêre*?" Good old Stephen! He was not likely to pass over such a point; and it was like him not to be sure of such a thing. He had immense industry, but he didn't

know how to think. When Tony whispered back “luceo” he nodded his head, quite satisfied. He would never forget now that “lucere” was of the second declension; but he had known it already if he had cared to think.

Tony considered this for a moment in his mind, so easily switched off from one subject to another. He saw more of Stephen than of any other boy in the school, for they lived next to one another, Tony in a big house, Stephen in a little one. The association was of more advantage to Stephen than it was to Tony, and Tony was quite aware of it, accepting superiority as his right, but not pushing it. His feeling for Stephen was affectionate, but he sometimes allowed himself to be irritated by his friend’s slowness and carefulness.

Stephen’s mother was a widow with a very small income. Stephen was to go to Oxford or Cambridge as a preparation for taking Orders, but he would have to gain a scholarship or exhibition in order to do so, and it seemed almost impossible that he should. Yet here he was in the Upper Fifth, and Tony, who was just his age and had come to the school at the same time, was no higher, though his brains seemed to himself twice as good as Stephen’s, and were certainly twice as quick. He was to go to Oxford or Cambridge himself if he succeeded in gaining a scholarship or exhibition. That was the condition his father had laid down, not from lack of means to send him there without such help, but because he was destined for a business career, and Mr. Dare considered a University training waste of time in such a case, and waste of money. But if Tony earned it, or part of it, he might have it. That was the understanding.

But at the back of his mind was the feeling that his father would let him go to Oxford even if he didn’t get a scholarship. He usually did let him do what he wished.

That was another cause of his conviction of superiority over Stephen, whose life was most rigorously ordered for him by his mother. Tony was feeling particularly happy, for reasons already stated, and, as sometimes happened when he was in just that condition of self-satisfaction, he had an impulse of pity and affection for his friend.

This feeling, curiously enough, was heightened by the way in which Stephen was now gabbling over the lines that had to be learnt by heart, in a whisper audible to his immediate neighbours. He was repeating each line five times, then two lines, then three lines, making them sound like so much nonsense, as probably they were to him, for he had no literary tastes. Tony had got the whole passage by heart by reading it over three times, and then repeating it with occasional reference to the text. The music of it sang in his ears, but it would have no music for Stephen. He knew, for he had tested him with poetry; but it was odd, because Stephen liked music, and liked to strum on the piano when he was at Ifield Lodge.

Good old Stephen! He wanted to be an engineer, and he could pick up anything about machinery, although he had to slave so hard to make anything of a showing at his school work. It had been the greatest delight to him when Mr. Dare had put electric light into Ifield Lodge, which was a boldly progressive thing to do in those days. Stephen had got the hang of it completely by the time the installation was complete, and was often called in to make minor adjustments. He had earned many a half-crown from Mr. Dare by his fiddlings, but he had to hand them over to his mother, who put them in the Savings Bank for him. Stephen had over fourteen pounds in the Savings Bank. Tony hadn't anything, but was quite

free from envy on that score. He received a half-a-crown a week pocket money, and occasional golden tips besides, and spent his money as soon as he got it, not always on himself.

What a difference there was in his lot and that of Stephen! who, however, would never admit that he had anything to grumble about, and never did grumble, though Tony often did, in spite of his good fortune. The two boys would go home together by and by, and the moment they got outside the school gates Tony's day and a half of freedom and pleasure would begin, spoilt only by the two hours or so of preparation which would have to be done for Monday's work. That would be put off until Sunday evening in his case, but Stephen was not allowed to open a book that had to do with school work on a Sunday, unless it was a Greek Testament. Nor was he allowed to come to Ifield Lodge at all on Sunday; for games were sometimes played there, and Mrs. Hawthorne was adamant against any sort of game on Sunday.

Until about tea-time their paths would not diverge, for they would both be playing cricket. But with the drawing of the stumps Stephen's meagre week-end holiday would come to an end. He would have to do his preparation for Monday just as on other days of the week, and go to bed soon after nine with nothing but the prospect of his dreadful Sunday before him. But when Saturday afternoon's cricket ended, and the boys in the three boarding-houses, and such day-boys as Stephen, who were kept no less strictly to times and seasons, had finished their play, Tony became until Monday morning a private inhabitant of Hilbury, and turned his eager attention to such pleasures that could be obtained in that sociable place.

This evening he was going straight from the School Field to play lawn tennis with the Hopwoods, where there was always a large and merry party on Saturdays, and where he was always made very welcome. The Hopwoods lived in a house a good deal larger than Ifield Lodge, with grounds of such an extent that it was like being in the country instead of in a suburb of London. There was a large family of Hopwoods, but they were all a good deal older than he was, except Maud, who was only a year or so older. Tony was rather in love with Maud, who was very pretty and very lively and very friendly with him, treating him as a young boy, but not in such a way as to offend him. In fact, he rather liked to be treated as a young boy by Maud, though he would have objected to it strongly from any other of the girls whom he knew in Hilbury, with some of whom he had also been slightly in love from time to time.

The Hopwoods had only lately come to live at Hilbury Grange, as their house was called, though quite unlike a grange, with its stained glass windows, tessellated hall and pitch pine panelling. They were different from the ordinary run of Hilbury residents, and a constant stream of fresh people was to be met at their house, unlike other houses, where the same people were always to be met. The Hopwood boys, who were all in the City, except the youngest, who was still at Cambridge, were extremely friendly to Tony, but treated him as something of a joke, with the large freedom he enjoyed in term time. He did not object to this either, though he sometimes wished he had been sent to a well-known school such as Harrow, where all the Hopwood boys had been, instead of as a day-boy to Hilbury. There was the uneasy feeling at the back of his mind that his unusual freedom was not the best thing for him. He was not even obliged to play cricket

and football, and it had been actually owing to Morton Hopwood's chaff that he had played regularly this term instead of amusing himself with lawn tennis in the gardens of Hilbury, and missing his chance of distinction. But he was taking his cricket seriously enough now, and his conscience was all the clearer over the enjoyment he could gain in his spare time.

Cricket ended at six o'clock, after which the boarders would be immured in their boarding-houses, and Stephen Hawthorne would go home to Ifield Cottage and all the rigours attendant on his state. Tony would go off to Hilbury Grange, where all the white-flannelled men and the linen-frocked girls would be hard at it on the two courts, or sitting on the terrace which overlooked them. He would be hailed with acclamation as soon as he was descried. Tea would be over, but Maud would have seen to it that a royal spread was reserved for him, and he would consume the toast and the cakes and the strawberries and cream with hearty encouragement to further efforts by those who were resting between the sets. Then he would play one or two himself, and all his failures in that company of enthusiastic experts would be forgiven him because he was a favourite with them all, and his company was more to be desired than his skill. When it was too dark to play any more they would go indoors. There would be a sumptuous cold supper and a great deal of talk and laughter with it; and after that they would dance in the picture gallery which Mr. Hopwood had built to accommodate his fine collection of Leightons, Leaders, and Friths, and other Academicians, with wanderings in the garden between whiles.

Tony intended to ask Maud to go into the garden with him. The determination was growing in his mind that some day he would kiss her, and perhaps this eve-

ning would provide the occasion. However that might turn out, he was going to lead the conversation into such a path that a kiss might very well come at the end of it. He was going to call her "Sabrina fair." If necessary he was going to do it more than once, until she asked him what he meant. Then he was going to quote her the lines ending with "amber-dropping hair" and tell that he had at once thought of her when he had first read it, and gone on thinking of her. After that anything might happen among the trees of the Grange garden; it would depend upon what hold he could keep on his wits to cope with the laughing play that Maud would make with him. Maud was very beautiful and very kind. He was pretty certain that she liked him, but not so certain that she liked him in the same way as he was beginning to like her. That was what he hoped to find out this evening.

At this point Tony's rose-coloured dreams were brought to a close by the hearing of the lesson, but the sense of pleasant anticipation stayed with him. The upper halves of the ground glass windows were open and the thick foliage of an elm could be seen from where he was sitting. A bee had got into the room, and had not yet succeeded in finding its easy way out again, though already satisfied that no honey was to be gathered in that bare place. The leaves and the blue sky and the drone of the bee all meant summer, and the very heat of the room, by now beginning to be oppressive, meant summer and the languorous delights of summer. It could be felt even through the hearing of a lesson by Mr. Broadbent, whose method did not encourage day-dreaming.

The lesson pursued its ordinary course. One boy after another was put sharply on to repeat a few lines of the passage that had been learnt. He had to spring up when his name was called and go on where the last boy had left

off. If he began quickly and went on quickly he was taken off almost immediately, sometimes even after saying one line; if he stumbled he was allowed to go on for several, with an imposition looming ahead of him if his stumblings were continued.

When the “repetition” was over Mr. Broadbent always made a little speech. Nobody could ever tell what line it would take; but its conclusion was generally the same, and indicated his opinion of the boys he had to teach. He was a terror—old Broadbeans—with his angry little eyes in a fat bearded face, and his high-pitched scathing speech; but he was not unpopular, and the boys in his House liked him. His “impots” were ferocious, but they were seldom incurred. For missing chapel, for instance, the tariff was two hundred lines of Homer with stops and accents, when in other forms the offence might be overlooked if a satisfactory excuse was forthcoming. Mr. Broadbent admitted no excuse, and consequently nobody ever did miss chapel in the Upper Fifth. The question had been fought out before Anthony had come to the school, but its echoes still lingered.

A day-boy who lived a few stations down the line arrived late one snowy winter morning when the trains were running behind time. Two hundred lines. Mr. Broadbent had nothing to do with trains. It was the boy’s duty to reach the school in time for nine o’clock chapel, and it was his business to see that he did it. The snow continued, and next morning the boy was late again. Two hundred lines. The third morning he brought a letter of polite protest from his father instead of his lines. Mr. Broadbent answered the letter, but demanded the lines, granting him an extra day for doing them. The parent appealed to the Headmaster, who was supposed to have advised leniency; but whether he did so or

not, Mr. Broadbent had his way. If the train by which the boy was accustomed to travel was not certain of getting him to school punctually he must travel by an earlier one, which he did thenceforward, until his father took him away from the school at the end of the term.

Mr. Broadbent detested day-boys, as such, and in the holidays he would never recognize even those who were in his own Form if he met them in the street, unless, of course, he knew their "people." He was a mass of cantankerous and reactionary prejudices, but in his Form he was scrupulously fair, though it was generally supposed that it cost him a severe twinge to give one of his rare words of commendation to a day-boy.

This English lesson, to which only two hours of the working week were devoted, was easy enough to boys trained in the classics as Mr. Broadbent trained them. There was no faltering in the passage that had been learnt by heart, and nobody made any mistakes in the subject-matter of the notes, except Tony, who was unable to give a satisfactory account of Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet, and was "taken up" by Stephen. Yet it appeared that Mr. Broadbent was not satisfied. There were a few minutes of the hour left, in which he could exercise his eloquence.

He shut his book and looked around upon the Form with what seemed to be a gaze of malevolence. "I don't know whether it has occurred to any of you," he said, "that Milton was a poet. It has been my constant endeavour to get it into what you are pleased to call your brains that certain Greek and Latin authors, whose memories you insult whenever you have to do with them, intended something more by writing in verse than to fit words together so that they would scan correctly. I had some hopes that one or two of you here and there might

have discovered the fact for yourselves in the case of a poet writing in your own language, but as usual any hopes of that sort that I have been rash enough to indulge have been disappointed. I'm not sure that there isn't *one* boy, however, idle and vicious as I know him to be, who has a glimmering of what Milton was trying to do—what Milton *did*—when he wrote 'Comus' and other of his earlier poems. Dare, stand up and repeat the piece you have been learning."

Tony, enormously surprised at this invitation, did as he was told, but Mr. Broadbent stopped him half-way. "You can sit down," he said. "I see I was mistaken. You can only gabble, after all. Now I don't profess to be able to read poetry as it ought to be read aloud, but I will read this passage to you and try to put *some* meaning into it."

He did so. His modesty was well-founded. There was no quality in his voice, which was hard and monotonous. Tony, thoroughly annoyed at having been exalted and then rudely cast down before the whole Form, thought that there was even something a little ludicrous in his efforts to impart emotion into the beautiful lines. But nobody else seemed to think so. The Form sat gazing at the reader, prepared to show discreet rapture when he had finished. It was all in the day's work. They had been reading "Comus" twice a week since the beginning of term, and this was the first time they had been invited to consider it in the light of poetry. A rum old bird—Broadbeans! But the hour was very nearly over.

He closed the book, and at that moment the bell in the gate-turret outside rang its welcome strokes. Nobody stirred. Mr. Broadbent's Form was dismissed by Mr. Broadbent, not by the bell.

He looked round him out of his little red angry eyes. "Milton was a poet," he said, "the greatest English poet after Shakespeare." He looked round again. "You may go."

CHAPTER II

HALF-HOLIDAY

TONY walked home with Stephen, as he had anticipated. He would have avoided him if he could, because he was still annoyed at the snub administered to him by Mr. Broadbent. Although Stephen was his closest companion, he looked upon him as his inferior, and it pained him to be debased in his eyes.

Stephen, however, refused to behave as Tony's inferior, in spite of the obvious differences in their worldly lot. He came running after him with a cheerful, "Why can't you wait for a fellow?" and they went out of the school yard together.

"Old Broadbeans knows how to take you down a peg when you fancy yourself the boy," said Stephen, with a broad grin on his ugly wholesome face. "I thought you were spitting it out particularly well myself. So did you. I suppose that's why he downed you."

There was too much truth in this for Tony's taste. "He's a disagreeable old beast," he said, vindictively. "But he'd have had you off your perch just the same, or anybody else."

"He'd never have put me on it," said Stephen. "It's you that's the soaring human boy, not me."

One of the tastes that the literate Anthony and the illiterate Stephen had in common was the novels of Dickens. They did not discuss them, but quotations were frequent in their conversation.

"Why should he be such a beast?" asked Tony.

"The pater asked him to dine when I got into his Form, and he just refused, and never took any more notice of me afterwards than if—if—"

"Than if your pater weren't rich," Stephen concluded for him.

Tony stopped in the road. "Look here, Stephen," he said angrily. "If you've got one of your insulting fits on, I'm hanged if I'll stand it."

"All right, old boy; it slipped out," replied Stephen good-naturedly. "I'm jolly glad your pater is rich, myself. Makes more fun for me."

Tony was mollified. Dear old Stephen! There was never any doubt of his appreciation of the pleasures that Tony was enabled to put in his way. But he would not kow-tow for them. Tony respected him for that, though he was not always innocent of a desire to have his superior opportunities envied.

All his irritation suddenly vanished. The sun in a sky of June blue shone upon the white road, dappled with the shadows of its bordering trees. The fore-courts of the old red brick houses behind their tall iron gates were bright with flowers, and gave earnest of the pleasant gardens behind them. The confinement of dusty classrooms and the discipline of work were over. Tony belonged now to lawns and trees and flowers, and felt himself already grasping his freedom, and the hot summer weather, in clean white flannels, enjoying every moment of his life.

"Oh, blow old Broadbeans," he said. "He only matters in school-time. We're rid of him until Monday morning, anyhow." He made the motion of bowling with his right arm, the books he was carrying bunched up under his left. "I feel like getting them out this afternoon," he said.

"Good old W. G.!" remarked Stephen. "I say, let's go and have a look at the engine. I needn't be home for another twenty minutes."

"You can, if you like," said Anthony. "I'm going to have a go in at the raspberries."

"Well, perhaps that's a brighter idea still," said Stephen after a short pause. "I suppose there are enough for two."

"Oh, yes, rather," said Tony. "Give us an appetite for lunch. Hulloo! Here's Ruth!"

A girl of thirteen or so had come out from a lane just in front of them. She also carried books under her arm. Her long fair hair hung straight from under her little straw hat. It was her chief claim to beauty. She was not so plain in feature as Stephen, but they would have been known as brother and sister from their likeness. She waited for them and smiled a demure greeting at Tony, who was smiled at by most girls of his acquaintance.

"You're late getting out," said Tony. "Hope you haven't been getting into trouble, Ruth."

"Oh, no," she said. "I waited behind for a little because I wanted to make sure of catching Stephen. You said you'd help me plant my geraniums before dinner, Stephen, and I thought you might have forgotten."

"Well, to be perfectly honest with you, I *had* forgotten," said Stephen. "Glad you reminded me."

"Stephen was coming to eat raspberries with me," said Tony. "Can't you come too, and plant afterwards?"

"Oh, you know the mater wouldn't let her," said Stephen. "Come and help us plant. The raspberries will be there this evening. I'll come and help you with them after cricket if you like."

"I'm going to the Grange after cricket," said Tony. "But I'll come now if you like."

"Raspberries off!" said Stephen cheerfully, as they turned in at the gate of Ifield Cottage.

They went in to the little hall to deposit their books. Mrs. Hawthorne came out of the sitting-room. She was a tall, thin woman in the late thirties, with a repressed air about her, but she shook hands with Tony, saying: "It was very kind of your father to send Ruth those beautiful plants. She has been looking forward to putting them in." Then she left them, with an admonition to Ruth and Stephen to come in in time to wash their hands and tidy themselves before dinner.

They went out into the garden at the back of the house. It was larger than might have been expected, and gratefully secluded, with its thick growth of lilacs and mayes, now beginning to get a little rusty, and a wide-branching elm which shaded the carefully kept lawn. Every inch of it was carefully cultivated and tended. On the gravel path that ran by the flower-border was a long row of pots containing geraniums of different colours, the overplus of those that had long since been bedded out at Ifield Lodge. The gardener had been glad to get rid of them, but they would give more pleasure here than the whole collection from which they had been discarded. Only, there scarcely seemed to be room for them in the beds already so full of summer flowers.

They divided up the colours, and decided where each was to go, and then became very busy with trowel, rake and watering-pot. Tony was interested in the preliminary discussion, and gave his advice freely. With his quick understanding he entered into the pleasure that made Ruth's eyes sparkle, and set free her tongue. He had long ceased to occupy himself with the plot that had

been assigned to him as a child in a corner of the garden at home, and took no interest at all in what was done with the rest of it, though he liked to see it full of flowers, and took pleasure in the spring and summer aspect of any garden. This was a sweet little garden at Ifield Cottage, and contained enough to make it interesting to do the actual work of it, as the Hawthornes did. But he thought it a trifle absurd that Ruth should express such gratitude towards her mother for allowing her to have her own way with these geraniums over the whole available flower-space, instead of planting them in her own tiny plot, where there would have been nothing like enough room. He held Mrs. Hawthorne always before him as somebody very stiff and severe, who ruled her children rigidly, and with unreasonable restraint, and in the main disapproved of him, Anthony Dare, in whom other people found plenty to approve and even to admire. He thought it would be dreadful to be bound down by rules and regulations as Ruth and Stephen were. It was really rather pathetic that they should make so much of such a permission as this, and showed how rigid her usual rule with them must be. It removed from him for the time being that faint sense of protected home life which sometimes came to him at Ifield Cottage. They were hurrying to get through with their gardening so as not to be a moment late in going in. No real freedom for them, though they were allowed these moments of pleasure now and again. Mrs. Hawthorne always stood over them, a stiff figure of authority, even when she was out of sight.

Tony hurried home when the planting was finished—not quickly enough to prevent the appearance of Mrs. Hawthorne at a window with a reminder of the hour. Lunch at Ifield Lodge was at half-past one on Satur-

days, when Mr. Dare came home early from the City. But Tony wanted to get into his flannels, and the raspberry canes still allured him. He went first to them, when he had thrown down his books in the hall, for he was hungry and had no middle-aged ideas about spoiling his luncheon. He picked the fruit with both hands, which was the way he took all his pleasures, and soon satisfied his immediate craving. He would have stayed longer among the raspberries if there had been somebody to bear him company. It did just cross his mind, as he was stuffing himself, that Stephen was rather fortunate in having a sister as his companion at home, who followed his lead, was there when he wanted her, and did not get in the way when there was the greater attraction of male companionship. Ruth remained outside Tony's feminine prepossessions. She was too young for one thing, and he thought her plain, in spite of her long corn-coloured hair, though her features were regular and she looked nice when she smiled. People's sisters were on the whole rather a puzzle to him. Obviously, they were not attractive to their brothers, in the way that girls were apt to be attractive. He supposed that they stood to them as somewhat inferior boys, though it was odd to think of Maud Hopwood for instance, being regarded in that light, even by a brother. But with Ruth it was not difficult. He would rather have had her with him among the raspberries than be tucking into them alone. His life at home would almost certainly have been jollier if he had had a sister. A brother of his own age he had never wished for. His half-brother Henry, nearly twenty years older than himself, was more than enough for that sort of relationship.

Henry and Laura were coming to lunch, as they often did on Saturdays. A shade came over Tony's face

as he remembered it. Then he laughed to himself. He was in the mood to take it out of Henry, who strongly disapproved of him, but was powerless to make his disapproval effective.

He left the raspberry canes and went through the kitchen garden with its ordered rows of vegetables, its espaliered apple-trees, and the peaches and nectarines ripening on the sun-warmed walls, and across the lawn to the house. The lawn sloped gently away from the levelled space below the terrace, and on its borders were big elms and limes. Through a gap in the trees could be seen only woods and undulating fields, though other houses and gardens were all about, and over the ridge of the hill a mile away was the still more populous suburb of Heathside. There was a sense of space and freedom in the garden of Ifield Lodge, with its gracious outlook that might have stretched beyond the woods and fields into untouched country. Tony loved the country, though he had always lived in Hilbury, and knew little of it except a few seaside places, and his grandfather's Rectory in Norfolk, where he had spent many of his holidays. He paused now for a moment to look out over the fields, soaking in the hot sunshine and the woods, which were already taking on the darker green of summer. It all helped to emphasize this blissful time of the year, when all life that counted most was lived in the open air, and the holidays were always drawing nearer.

The house, the main rooms of which faced the lawn and the view through the trees, was of two stories, painted white, and covered with a giant wisteria, which had been in its full glory a few weeks before. The flower-beds immediately around it were set out with geraniums, fuchsias, heliotrope, and other half-hardy plants beloved of the suburban gardener. It was all left to him, for in those

days it was only the little gardens, such as the one at Ifield Cottage, that were tended by their owners. But the result was bright and gay. The beds were all cared for, and the lawn kept beautifully smooth and neat. On the gravelled terrace which ran along the house, and to which two of the downstairs rooms opened by French windows, were tubs of hydrangeas, and one or two of blue agapanthus. There was an air of opulence about the whole setting of the house, and this always pleased Anthony. This morning, as he cast his eye round it before going in, it pleased him because he had divined that it was rather displeasing to Henry, who lived in a row of villas all alike in another suburb, fortunately some distance from Hilbury. What a fate—to live in a little house at Estbridge, which had few of the amenities that surrounded Hilbury, though it was more convenient for London, to go in to the City every day, and to come home to the little house every evening! Tony could have pitied Henry if he had not shown so plainly that he was envious of his own happier lot.

The tiled hall was cool after the mid-day heat outside, and smelt summery, with flowers from the greenhouse all about it. Tony ran upstairs to the room which had been his nursery, and was now inhabited chiefly by old Nanny, who had been his nurse.

She sat by the open window sewing, her spectacles on her nose, her white hair very smooth underneath her cap. She had been his mother's nurse too, and it was from her that he knew most about his mother, who had died at his birth, for his father never talked to him about her.

Nanny greeted him with a "Well, dearie," and a smile, as she looked at him from over her spectacles, her head bent. He kissed her fresh cheek. He was very fond of old Nanny, who stood to him for all things maternal.

He was apt to pity himself sometimes for being motherless, but his self-pity was no more than a mild indulgence in sentiment. He would not have exchanged Nanny for any of the mothers of his friends. She loved him, waited on him, and sought to exercise no authority whatever. Moreover she disliked Henry, though she would never admit it. Tony often called her "dearie" when they were alone together, as she always called him, and he knew that he never did so without giving her pleasure. He was inclined to be a little proud of himself for showing his affection for her as he did; but his affection was genuine enough all the same.

"What a nice peaceful old thing you look!" he said, as he kissed her, with a little hug of her frail shoulder. "Have you ironed out my flannels? I think I'll change before lunch. That always rather annoys Henry. He'll be rather hot when he's walked up the hill in his City clothes."

She held up an admonishing finger at him. "Now you mustn't begin on that, dearie," she said. "You enjoy yourself in your way, and leave Mr. Henry to enjoy himself in his."

Anthony leant against the window frame, and fingered the leaves which crowded all about it from outside. "Do you think he does enjoy himself?" he asked. "I shouldn't, much, if I lived at Acacia Villas instead of Ifield Lodge."

"It's a very nice little house," said old Nanny. "When a young gentleman marries he can't expect to live in a house like he was brought up in. That comes afterwards, when he gets on in the world."

This was rather a new idea to Anthony, who had pictured Henry as settled permanently in some such abode as No. 1, Acacia Villas, though for himself Ifield Lodge

seemed the more natural type of abode, unless he should exchange it for a house right in the country. "Of course he did live here before he was married," he said. "I think if I'd been him I should have gone on living here."

"When a young gentleman marries," said Nanny, "or when anybody marries, they think more of having their own little home with the one they love than living in a big house without her."

This point of view was not beyond Anthony's comprehension. To live in a little house of one's own with somebody like Maud Hopwood would be rather attractive. But translated into terms of Henry and Laura it was not at all attractive. He laughed. "I suppose he did love Laura, or he wouldn't have married her," he said.

Old Nanny took him up rather quickly: "They oughter had some little ones," she said. "A home isn't the same without them."

Tony's partial vision of the married state had not reached so far as this. He laughed again, and went off to change into his flannels, which were lying all ready for him on his bed.

Mr. Dare and Henry arrived from the City shortly before lunch time; Laura, by another route, a few minutes later. Anthony heard them come in, but he had taken a book from the shelf that contained his chief treasures, and was reading it standing by the open window. He knew how triumphantly Miss Betsy Trotwood disposed of the Murdstones, with little David standing bunched up behind the chair, and Janet chasing the donkey-boys off the green outside, but he found the recital so fascinating that he had to finish it, and the gong had sounded some minutes before he went downstairs.

The three elders were already at the table when he

went into the dining-room; and Emma, the parlour-maid, was pouring out their claret, having already provided them with their first course. Anthony shook hands with Henry, who was nearest to him as he went in, and then kissed Laura. He had not been able to rid himself of this ceremony, though he had long since relinquished it with Henry. He disliked the cold peck that Laura gave him, and got rid of the feel of it by going to kiss his father, whose bearded face was much nicer to kiss than Laura's smooth one. His father was never demonstrative with him, but he knew, just as he knew with old Nanny, that a caress from him gave him pleasure. He loved his father, who was always generous to him, and let him go his own way where the fathers of other boys seemed always to be reining them in from this or that quite harmless inclination of boyhood. He did not now, for instance, express any sort of rebuke for his being nearly ten minutes late. He had been talking to Laura when Tony came in, and went on talking to her as he took his seat. Henry, however, considered it necessary to say: "I thought you got out of school at half-past twelve."

"Punctual to the minute," assented Tony, the light of battle in his eyes. "I've walked home, helped plant two dozen geraniums with the Hawthornes, eaten half a ton of raspberries, had a conversation with Nanny, changed my clothes, and read a chapter of 'David Copperfield' since half-past twelve. I like to make full use of my time."

Henry declined combat for the moment, but Laura, turning to him, said with her pinched smile: "We are coming down to the Field this afternoon. I suppose we shall see you make a great many runs."

"I hope so," said Tony; "though I can't promise. It's quite possible that I may not be batting when you come down."

"Well, you needn't be rude about it," said Henry, at once. "I suppose there's no offence in hoping that you are going to make runs."

"Not a bit," said Tony; "and I didn't mean to be rude. Fact is I'm always feeling rather perky about this time on Saturday. I dare say you used to be the same when you were at school. Games to play, and no work to do until Monday morning."

"There was always a good deal of work to do when I was at school," said Henry. "It used to take me all Saturday evening to do it."

"I always put mine off till late on Sunday evening," said Tony.

There was a slight pause. Henry's mother had been a Sabbatarian, and Henry himself, by inherited inclination, and under the influence of his wife, was also a Sabbatarian. His lip went down, but he did not pursue the subject, out of consideration for his father. Laura said, with an acid sweetness: "I always think it is best to keep Sunday as a day of rest. But I should not presume to dictate to others."

Mr. Dare turned the subject by asking of Henry: "Would you like to get anybody in to play tennis this afternoon? You've brought your bag up, haven't you?"

"I thought Laura and I might have a game when it gets cooler," said Henry. "Perhaps Tony will play when he comes back from the Field."

"I expect Tony has other fish to fry," said his father with a smile at him. "I don't see much of him on Saturdays."

After lunch, as the elders were drinking coffee on the

terrace and Tony was departing for the Field, Laura said she would walk to the gate with him. He knew quite well what was coming.

"I just wanted to say a word to you," she said. "Of course I shouldn't dream of interfering with the way you are allowed to spend your time, but—"

"You couldn't very well, could you?" interrupted Tony. "Father wouldn't like it."

"It's him I'm thinking of," she said. "Don't you think it's rather unkind to leave him so much to himself when he's at home? From what you said, you won't come home to-night until it's time to go to bed—much later than *I* should have thought it was right for a boy of your age to go to bed. He'll be all alone from the time we go, and—"

"He won't; because he's dining out."

"Oh," said Laura. "Well, then for to-night it won't matter. But you know you do leave him a great deal to himself, and I wanted to appeal to your better nature to think of him a little more. I'm sure it's wonderful the way he thinks of you. Perhaps it's natural with a child so much younger—but Henry was never treated with such indulgence when he was a boy. And yet, after his poor mother died, he would never have thought of leaving him alone as you do so constantly."

"Father likes me to play games out of doors in the summer," said Tony. "Henry didn't play games so much."

"He couldn't, because of his lameness," said Laura sweetly and calmly.

"Oh, you know I didn't mean that," said Tony, flustered and vexed. Laura was always bringing up Henry's lameness if she thought she could score off him by doing so. But Henry wasn't too lame to play games, even now.

Tony never thought of his lameness unless Laura brought it up in this way.

"Thanks for reminding me," he said awkwardly. "I like being with father when he's at home. I must go now, or I shall be late."

He left her standing at the gate, looking after him, with an expression that could not have been interpreted. Then she turned and went slowly back to the terrace. She was of about the same age as her husband, but had already acquired the stiff, almost sexless appearance that marks childless wives who have not kept themselves young in other ways. She was very neatly dressed, and had a thin upright body, and features that were regular in conformation; but she was noticeably lacking in feminine charm. Yet she and her husband were seldom apart, except when he was at his work.

She did not immediately rejoin the two men on the terrace, but turned off by a path which ran behind a shrubbery round under the trees, and led to the walled kitchen garden. Here she stood for a time looking at its well-ordered profusion, and at the range of glass-houses, forcing pits, potting sheds, at the other end of it, which spoke more than the pleasure garden itself of the comparative wealth that was involved in keeping up a place of this sort. She seemed to be taking it all in, but her face told nothing of her emotions.

She turned away rather suddenly, and went back to the shrubbery, where there was a shady arbour. She sat down in it, and took out of the reticule which she always carried a worn little book with a silver clasp, in which she read for a few minutes. Then she went slowly back to the terrace.

CHAPTER III

ROBERT STENNING

TONY hurried up the drive of Hilbury Grange, as eager as possible for the pleasure that was now to be his.

Cricket had been a little disappointing. He had batted fairly well, but his bowling had been more costly than he had anticipated: and it was his bowling that would get him his Third Eleven colours if he got them at all.

All the same, he had enjoyed the afternoon. Cricket was not merely an interesting game to him; it was a sensuous experience which he liked to savour. He was keenly aware all the time of the hot afternoon sun and the coolness of the lawn-like grass; of the whispering elms that bordered the field; of the thud of leather on soft wood that came from all about him, and the occasional voices of the players; of the scores of white figures standing all about the field, or moving in a rhythm that had its special meaning. Even the perspiration of his body pleased him, when he was batting or bowling, and the slight tiredness that came to him towards the end of the afternoon; for they were the tokens of health and vigour. And he was pleased with the discipline of the game. It was what made it a finer experience than lawn tennis, however much you might enjoy the freer more amusing surroundings of that game. It had been a temptation earlier in the summer to shirk attendance at the Field, and enjoy his afternoons in some garden; but he was glad now that he had stuck to cricket. It gave him a

sense of virtue, which was as agreeable a sensation as any.

Now he felt that he had earned the pleasures of the evening, anticipations of which had heightened his appreciation of the more austere pleasures of the afternoon. His tiredness would pass off completely when he had feasted and rested himself for half an hour, and he would be ready for anything in the way of active amusement.

The scene was much as he had pictured it in his illicit reverie of the morning. The sunshine slanted through the big trees that bordered the drive, and warmed the slopes and levels of mown grass to a golden green, upon which the shadows lay like pools of cool water. There was a mellow hue upon the brick of the rather pretentious house, softening it to beauty of tone where it was struck by the evening sun. Tony was not too eager for what was coming to be unaware of such signs of summer beauty as these. There was a gracious charm about the setting of Hilbury Grange which always gave him satisfaction, in spite of the modern house.

He went through the house, the doors of which stood open, to the parapeted terrace that ran along the back of it, and found himself in the middle of the lively party to which he had looked forward. Two games were going on in the courts below, and a dozen or so of people were sitting about the terrace or on garden seats at the edge of the lawn.

Tony's arrival was greeted with exactly the welcome which was so gratifying to him. He had seen at a glance that Maud was playing in one of the sets, but Morton Hopwood, sitting on the balustrade of the terrace, made an immediate fuss of him. "Ah, here's our young sybarite," he said, and immediately led him away to the tables at the end of the terrace, his hand on his shoulder.

"Now don't speak a word until you have taken a little strengthening food," he said. "You must be nearly fainting. Will you have it here, or go to bed and let them bring something up to you?"

The tables were still lavishly spread. A piled-up dish of strawberries and whipped cream caught Tony's eye, and gave him a thrill of pleasure. So did the wave of the hand with which Maud signalled her welcome from the lower court. And Morton's friendly chaff was just what he liked. Morton had played cricket for Harrow, and only just escaped his "Blue" at Cambridge. He was very good-looking besides—a young man to be intensely admired by a hero-worshipping schoolboy. Tony cried him up among his school-fellows, and was proud to be on such terms with him.

Two middle-aged men were sitting by one of the tables, smoking cigars, with long glasses of a refreshing-looking liquid at their elbows. One of them, who was in flannels, hastily finished his drink and went off to join a set, as Anthony was led up. The other sat on. He was a short, bearded man, dressed in an old tweed jacket and a pair of baggy homespun trousers. He wore an old green hat of soft felt, of which the colour had faded to a yellowish hue, and a pair of heavy walking boots. His whole appearance was markedly different from that of the guests usually to be seen at the Grange, whose note was that of the opulent mercantile. But he seemed very much at home, and there was something about him that indicated even to Tony, apt to be impressed by outward seeming, that he was not to be taken at the value of his clothes.

"Mr. Stenning," said Morton, "let me introduce my friend, Anthony Dare. You will find him the embodiment of happy careless youth, and I am sure a study of him would repay you for one of your books. I leave him

to your tender mercies for the present. Tony, I hope you will find everything you want here. If not, ring the alarm bell, and they'll fly to attend to you."

Morton went off and left Tony alone with the elderly gentleman, who regarded him with a quizzical but indulgent eye, and removed his pipe to say: "You needn't talk while you're tucking in."

But Tony wanted to talk. It was more exciting to meet a real live author than to eat sandwiches and cakes and strawberries and cream, though he did not propose to himself to go fasting. "I didn't expect to see you here, sir," he said ingenuously, "though Maud did tell me once that they knew you. I think I should have cut cricket and come earlier if I had known you would be here."

Stenning's eye rested upon the handsome boy, whose gaze was eager and candid, and his rough-hewn much-lined face showed pleasure. But all he said, without removing the pipe from his mouth this time, was: "Never chuck cricket. Never chuck cricket for anything."

"I know it's a good thing to stick to, even if you're not first class," said Tony. "Did you play when you were at Rugby—and Oxford?"

"Indifferently, I did," said Stenning. "But how on earth did you know I was at Rugby and Oxford? I've almost forgotten it myself."

"Oh, I looked you up in a book, when Maud said she knew you. I'm interested in authors. I'm rather hoping to be one myself some day. And I've read 'Sons and Fathers.'"

"Have you indeed? Well, there are not many who can say the same. I read it myself the other day, and I don't think much of it. If I were you I wouldn't be an author."

Tony's face fell, so far as was consistent with a mouth filled and supported by anchovy sandwich. He had been interested in the early novel of Robert Stenning's that he had read, but a note of cynicism in it had somewhat offended his youthful enthusiasm. He had forgotten it when confronted by the author, whose face was not marked by cynicism; but it recurred to him now. He was silent for a moment, and then looked up with a quick smile. "No, I suppose you'd go and dig potatoes," he said.

Stenning stared at him for a moment, and then took his pipe out of his mouth, threw back his head, and gave a full-throated laugh. Afterwards, Tony knew that that laugh was seldom heard from him.

It ceased as suddenly as it had begun. "Perhaps you might succeed as an author, after all," said Stenning. "What do you read?"

"Dickens," said Tony tentatively.

"Soft stuff," said Stenning. "Thackeray, too, I suppose."

"Oh, yes."

"Thackeray was a sentimental snob. Do you read Scott?"

"Not much."

"Find him dull? So do I. Stupid, too. But he was honest. I shouldn't have minded talking to Scott, though I'm hanged if I'm going to read him."

"I love Stevenson."

"What, that posturing mountebank? Well, I think I should dig potatoes if I were you, after all, when you finish playing cricket. The only thing worth doing is to get an honest sweat every day. If you have to earn your bread by it, so much the better for you."

"Why?" asked Tony.

Stenning laughed again, but not so loudly. "I see you're a prober," he said. "It's a good thing to be. Don't take anything for granted. The only things worth finding out are the things that you find out for yourself."

He had not answered Tony's question, which had been asked to elicit information, not to put him in a quandary. Tony had made a cleaner hit than he had intended by his reference to digging potatoes, drawn from something that he had suddenly remembered in the book of Stenning's that he had read. He had had no experience of the literary pose which affects to despise literature, and had had no idea of charging Stenning with it. He did not like to repeat his question, as to why it was better to earn bread by the sweat of your brow than by writing, for instance, but said: "I should think it must be the best life in the world to write books."

It was Stenning this time who asked: "Why?" But he did not wait for a reply. "It's worth doing if you have something to write about," he said. "Most people who write haven't. I don't suppose you will have for many years to come."

"Can't I practise?" asked Tony.

"Oh, yes. I suppose they teach you to make Latin verses, don't they? That's very good practice—one of the few sensible things they do teach you."

"I rather like doing that," said Tony reflectively. "But what about English prose? They don't teach us that."

"How sensible they are! They know nothing about it themselves. Probably they would want you to write like Stevenson."

"Stevenson said he had played the sedulous ape to Shakespeare."

"Yes, and all the little tuppenny-ha'penny stylists play the sedulous ape to Stevenson. That's no good. When

you've found something to say you will find your own way of saying it, and it won't be Stevenson's way, or Shakespeare's either, for that matter."

"How old were you when you wrote your first book?" asked Tony.

"Ah, there you've got me again," said Stenning with a smile. "You seem to have a way of getting at things. I wrote my first book soon after I had left Oxford. At lease, I wrote most of it while I was at Oxford, but I had the grace to write it all over again. It was a very bad book, and the only satisfaction I have is that I did write it again, so as to make it as good as I could then. However, nobody read it, and I'm more thankful for that than anything. If it had brought me in some money, I should have gone on writing books, and shouldn't have spent the next five years lumbering. They were the best five years I've known, and I've had over sixty of them."

"What do you mean—lumbering?" asked Tony, quite at a loss.

"Lumbering is American for cutting down trees, and dealing with their timber. I went to British Columbia. What a country! Glorious climate, natural beauties that sink in and get right hold of you, everybody doing something real, except the scoundrels who are out to exploit other people's labour—and there weren't so many of them forty years ago as there are now. It was a grand life for a man. I wish I had stuck to it."

"Why didn't you?" Tony ventured to ask, with a "sir" tacked on to the question, so that it should not sound impertinent.

"Ah, why didn't I?" Stenning returned, sucking at his pipe, and then began to talk of his life in the dim green forests of the Pacific slope; of the giant's work accomplished during the day, with muscles as hard as steel, and

the tireless strength of youth, which it was a glory to use; of the talk round the camp fires in the scented dusk; of the still, solemn nights, when sleep was deep and refreshing, but the mind was somehow aware of the clean freshness in which the body reposed itself. He talked of sport, in the deep woods and on the waters of that virginally beautiful land, and of the comradeship of men like himself, who had shaken off the chains of civilization to live this free and happy life, than which there was none better on God's good earth. Long ago, oh, long ago! And now he was an old man living in the smoke, and busying himself with things that didn't matter a tinker's cuss beside the sun and the wind and the blue waters.

Tony listened to him, fascinated. He had forgotten all about where he was, and was brought to himself as if from a far country, as some of the players came towards them and summoned him to make up a set. He did not see Stenning again to speak to. He played rather badly—his mind full of what he had just heard. But he forgot it again when it was too dark to play any longer and they all went in to supper, and he enjoyed himself immensely, as the talk and laughter, in which he took his full share, passed to and fro across the table.

After supper he left the men in the dining-room and went out with the women, as his modest custom was. "That's a jolly boy," said the man who had been sitting on the terrace with Stenning. "Don't care about boys of that age generally. They are either trying to behave like men, or else they are noisy and tiresome."

"Oh, Tony's all right," said Morton Hopwood. "We're all doing our best to spoil him, but I hope we shan't succeed. He's got stuff in him, if he can find out what it is."

Tony slipped his arm into Maud's, as they went up to

the picture gallery, where the men were under promise to join them in not more than ten minutes. "I say, I'm awfully glad I've got to know Mr. Stenning," he said. "He's a splendid old man—awfully interesting. Have you got any more of his books? I've read 'Sons and Fathers.'"

"I don't think so, Tony, but I'll look for you to-morrow, if you like. I've never read any of them. Are they good?"

Tony laughed, after a pause of reflection. "It's a funny thing," he said, "I didn't really care for the one I read—much. But I forgot all about it when I was talking to him; he's awfully interesting himself."

"I don't think people do read his books much. I didn't even know he was a writer when he first came here, and I can't remember who brought him. I think he was a friend of Uncle Jack's, and they walked out together from London. He seems to like coming, and he always does walk here. But I haven't talked to him much; I've been rather afraid of him."

"Oh, you needn't be. He's a splendid old man."

"Yes, you said that before. But you see I don't take so much interest in books and their authors as you do. By the by, Roy Carrington is coming here to-morrow. I *am* rather excited about that, because I simply adore his books."

"Roy Carrington!"

"Yes, I thought that would fetch you. Will you come to tea and be introduced to him?"

"Oh, I wish I could. But you know father likes me to stay at home with him on Sunday afternoons."

"I am sure he wouldn't mind just for once, would he?"

Tony considered this. Though he had been annoyed

with Laura for attacking him on the subject, his conscience had more than once pricked him for enjoying himself so much away from home when his father was there. But he did want very much to meet Roy Carrington, whose novel, "Gentlemen, The King," everybody had read, himself included.

"Why not ask him to come too," Maud suggested, and he jumped at the idea, though his father seldom went out except to see his own personal friends, and had never been to the Grange since the Hopwoods had come to live there. It was true that Tony had asked a few friends of his own to come to tea with him on Sunday afternoon, which his father encouraged him to do; but he could easily put them off. The friends whom he asked to Ifield Lodge were apt to be people who could be put off at a moment's notice. With the exception of Stephen Hawthorne, he had few intimates among his school-fellows who did not acknowledge him as a leader among them.

Tony had not very long to enjoy the dancing. He was supposed to be home by ten o'clock, and it was not until after nine that they had left the supper table. Maud consented readily enough to go into the garden with him after the dance he had with her. She was looking very pretty, in a white frock, with deep violet ribbons in her dark hair, which she still wore in a thick plait down her back. But somehow, Tony did not feel inclined to make love to her, as he had intended on just this occasion. She was so friendly and so natural that it was nice to talk to her about what was interesting him, his arm in hers, as they strolled along the terrace, and on the path that ran by the lawns, under the trees; and he even forgot to call her "Sabrina fair."

He told her that he had made up his mind to go out to British Columbia, "or somewhere like that," and live

a glorious life, just as Mr. Stenning had done when he was young.

Maud laughed at him. "I thought you were going to write novels," she said.

"Oh, I shall do that too," said Tony lightly. "But he says you've got to know something before you can write good novels. You must learn to work with your hands first."

"Why with your hands?" she asked; but Tony couldn't tell her that; he could only repeat some of the things that Stenning had told him about that Paradise of a country, and the happy life that was to be led there, and try to get her to see it as he did.

Maud was very sympathetic. That was what made Tony like her so much---that she was always interested in what he had to tell her, even though she might not know much about it. She laughed at him sometimes, but took his enthusiasms seriously too.

"Yes, I can quite see that it would be a very attractive life for a man, Tony," she said. "But of course you would miss lots of things, too. You see Mr. Stenning didn't stick to it long. Of course he is an old man, and I suppose he hasn't been very successful. Wait till you see Roy Carrington. Fred says that he has a splendid time. They were at Cambridge together, and he went to be a schoolmaster, which he hated. But now he has lots of money, and goes wherever he likes. I should think, if you *can* write books that everybody reads, and make a lot of money out of them, it must be one of the jolliest things anybody can do---better even than going to British Columbia."

This was just what Tony had thought himself, hitherto. He had pictured himself at Oxford in a large quiet panellled room, overlooking a garden, such as he had seen

once when he had been there, writing delightful and most readable novels, which would be widely read from the first. They would bring him fame and lots of money, upon which he would be able to live just the life he liked, and go anywhere he pleased. It is true that at other times he had thought of himself as a soldier, or an explorer, and even as a successful business man; but the business career was never to deprive him of the opportunity of enjoying himself, wherever it might be, but only to provide money for living in a fine house, and having plenty of people to enjoy themselves there, as the Hopwoods did at the Grange. He had made all sorts of plans about his future, unhampered by the fact that he was definitely destined to go into his father's office after he had finished with his schooling, and perhaps with the University. Curiously enough, only this one plan of writing novels had presented itself to him with any anticipation of the work to be done in it, although so far he had not written anything of his own, except one or two essays for Mr. Broadbent, which he had thought showed much more originality than the essays written by anybody else in the Form, though Mr. Broadbent had not seemed to be particularly struck with them.

But now, as he hurried home, soon after ten o'clock, along the quiet tree-bordered lanes, in the warm darkness of the summer night, this vision of himself as a popular novelist had receded from his mind, in spite of the rather thrilling fact that he was going to meet for the first time a really popular novelist the next day. Mr. Stenning had fired his imagination with a new idea. It was nothing that, as Maud had said, he would miss the pleasures of civilization in the life of a new country. It was the life itself that would be so glorious, lived in such beautiful surroundings: the life of ultimate simplicity, which

brought its own abounding satisfaction. It allied itself in his mind with his holidays in the Norfolk Rectory, where life was of the simplest—at least for him—but all the richer on that account. Sometimes, when he had been day-dreaming, in school-time, he had been seized with an almost insupportable longing for the quiet country in which his grandfather lived his life year in and year out—for the shabby roomy house, and the ill-kept lawns of the garden, overhung by dark trees; for the slow-moving waters that flowed by it, with their flower-decked banks, and the birds in the sedges; for the large half-ruinous church with its unforgettable smell; for the thatched cottages, and the slow speech of the villagers. His plans for the future had even included a parsonage deep in the country, with himself as a revered and contented clergyman. This nostalgia for a life almost entirely cut off from the world had even come to him at times when he was thoroughly enjoying himself with the sociabilities of Hilbury, as he was doing now in the middle of the summer term. Nature had that power to affect him, especially in imagination. Surely he would get just what he wanted, living and working in a new unspoilt country, more beautiful in its odorous woods and gleaming waters than anything that could be found in the old!

CHAPTER IV

ROY CARRINGTON

TONY and his father met at breakfast the next morning.

In after life Tony looked back upon these summer Sunday mornings as most significant of the happiness of his home life. He was no sluggard, and often arose at dawn, for it seemed such waste to miss those early unspoilt hours; but on Sundays he revelled in the extra hour that nine o'clock breakfast gave him, though he generally spent it in reading, lying luxuriously on his elbow, while the fresh morning air came to him through the wide-open window, and the birds in the garden sang him a song to the effect that life was a most enjoyable experience.

The dining-room at Ifield Lodge was one of the pleasantest rooms in the house, spacious and bright, with long windows opening into the garden. It had a more comfortable air than if it had been used only for meals; the library, in which Mr. Dare mostly sat when he was at home, was rather dark, and he preferred this room in the morning. There were easy-chairs, and books, and a writing-table in it. The furniture was quiet and old-fashioned; there were a few landscapes on the walls, of no special merit, but not such as to clash with the subdued yet sunny aspect of the room. Its restful influence made itself felt on these Sunday mornings, when breakfast was a leisurely meal, not to be immediately followed by a hurried preparation of lessons postponed from the night before, or overshadowed by the anxieties of school.

Tony could tell by his father's clothes whether he was

going to church or not. In those days nearly everybody went to church at least once on Sundays, and in such places as Hilbury the men always wore black coats and silk hats. Henry and Laura thought it shocking that Mr. Dare was not regular in his attendance, and had not been able to disguise their disapproval from Tony. He was just old enough to remember the time before Henry's marriage, when there had been family prayers after breakfast every morning, and his father and Henry had gone to church twice on Sundays. It was not until some years later that he had awoke to the fact that there had been a gradual relaxation of these habits, and old Nanny had told him, under strict cross-examination, that Mr. Henry's mother had been very strict in such matters. Had his own mother been strict? Oh, no! Nanny's face always took on a tender light when she spoke of her. She had been so good and happy, she told him, and everybody loved her so much, that there was no occasion for her to be strict with anybody. Tony liked this point of view, though it hardly seemed to explain why family prayers had been dropped, and his father sometimes came down to breakfast on Sunday mornings in a grey jacket suit, and did not go outside his garden during the whole day. When this happened Tony would go to the School Chapel, which began at half-past ten, and was over at half-past eleven. Sabbatarian relaxation had not reached the point at which he would have been allowed to stay at home himself.

Mr. Dare had on his grey suit this morning. For once Tony regretted the indication. He had had an idea of managing an exit alongside the Hopwoods, when the suggestion of his going to the Grange that afternoon would have been made, and his father, perhaps, have been persuaded to go too. Now he would have to ask per-

mission for himself, and he was in two minds about doing it at all. It was not only that he knew his father liked to have him at home on Sundays; he liked to be there himself. There was a sense of protection and security in the life of his home, which was summed up in his father's presence, even though he might not spend all his time with him. Still he would only be away an hour or so, if he did go to the Grange; and he did very much want to meet Roy Carrington.

The first thing Mr. Dare asked him when they were settled at the breakfast table was how had he enjoyed himself the evening before. He embarked upon an enthusiastic description of Robert Stenning, the first author he had ever met in the flesh. He found that his father had read some of his books. He was always being surprised at what he had read. He had not had a classical education, and he did not talk about books, or about authorship, in the way that Tony was beginning to like to talk; but he had ranged wide, and his judgment was to be respected. "I don't care for his novels," he said; "but I liked that book he wrote about his early life in Canada."

Tony brightened up immediately. "He talked to me about that," he said. "It was splendid. I didn't know he'd written a book about it; he didn't tell me that. What was it called? Have you got it? I should love to read that. It made me want to go to Canada myself."

A little to his surprise Mr. Dare followed up the conversation about Canada. It was a very good thing for a young man to do, he said, to go out into the world and work in that way, better perhaps than working in an office in London, though there was nothing to be said against that, for any one to whom it came as the appointed way of making a living.

"Should you mind if I did it, father?" Tony asked. "I thought you wanted me to go into the City, with you."

Mr. Dare smiled. "The City would be a way of making your living," he said. "Later on it might be a very good living. But it would depend a good deal upon yourself. If you found another way of making it that you liked better I shouldn't object to your taking it."

"I want to write books too, you know," said Tony. "But Mr. Stenning says that you can't do that properly until you know something about life. I don't know whether Roy Carrington does. He was at Cambridge with Fred Hopwood, and then he was a schoolmaster. He is going to the Grange this afternoon. Would you come to tea with me there, father? I told Maud I would ask you if you would. I should love to meet Roy Carrington, wouldn't you? Have you read any of his books?"

"I read a few chapters of one of them. I thought you had some friends coming to tea with you this afternoon."

"I could easily put them off, when I go to Chapel. Do come, father. I know you'd like the Hopwoods, and I know they would like to meet you."

"No, I think I won't come, Tony. You can go if you want to. But don't stay to supper."

"Oh, no. I won't be there very long. Thank you so much, father dear. Are you sure you don't mind?"

Mr. Dare did not answer this question. His attitude towards Tony was not that of apparently complete equality, which hardly existed in those days in the intercourse of father and son. Tony talked to him more freely than most of his friends talked to their fathers, and was treated by him with an indulgence that none of them enjoyed. But there were still reserves between them, and Tony would never have questioned a direct command or prohibition from him.

As Tony passed Ifield Cottage on his way to the School Chapel, Mrs. Hawthorne and Ruth and Stephen came out of it. They went once every Sunday, and sometimes twice, to the church of which Mr. Hawthorne had been Vicar. They had to walk down the hill and take a lumbering horse-drawn omnibus to a point where they changed into a tram, which went by the ugly church in a crowded street, and landed them there. It took them three-quarters of an hour to get there, and rather longer to come home, for they had half a mile of steep hill to climb, and their Sunday dinner was sometimes as late as two o'clock. Tony pitied them more for this weekly episode in their hard existence than for almost any other reason; but Stephen grinned at him affably as he took off his hat, and Ruth smiled. They did not look very unhappy, though Mrs. Hawthorne wore her collected Sunday expression, and Tony knew that she did not allow them to talk of mundane affairs on these expeditions to and from church.

He had some slight difficulty with two of the friends whom he had asked to tea that afternoon. It appeared that both of them had refused other most attractive invitations in order to keep faith with him. But he dealt in an off-hand way with their protests. "If there's something you'd rather do, you can go and do it after all," he said. "All the jollier for you, because you can come to me next Sunday. Raby, you can tell Carter that he can't come, can't you? You live near him."

Raby objected to doing Dare's dirty work for him. "Oh, well, it doesn't matter," said Tony. "If he comes they'll tell him I'm out." Then he embarked upon an enthusiastic description of his evening at the Grange, with special reference to Morton Hopwood, but none to Maud or Robert Stenning or Roy Carrington. "He's

going to play against us for the M.C.C.," he said. "I believe they're going to bring rather a hot team, as I told him we were rather good this year."

"I suppose you and he made up the eleven between you," suggested Raby, still smarting under a sense of injury. "I wonder they didn't ask you to play for them."

"I'm not a member yet," said Tony calmly. "But Morton Hopwood is going to put me up, and he says I may get in as a playing member in a few years' time."

They scoffed at this, but it impressed them all the same, as Tony knew it would. He strolled into chapel as the bell began to quicken its strokes, and took his seat with an air to which he was hardly yet entitled by the niceties of school etiquette. Probably not even Ambrose, Captain of the Eleven, one of the best cricketers Hilbury School had ever had, who was going up to Cambridge with the hope of a "Blue," had yet been proposed for the M.C.C. At the same time it wouldn't do to swagger about it. Tony rather regretted that he had let it out to Raby, and determined to ask him to keep the information to himself, though without much hope of his doing so.

Mr. Broadbent read the first part of the service, the Headmaster from his stall at the west end of the chapel the second. It was a business affair with Mr. Broadbent, who read as fast as possible without gabbling. The Headmaster put some unction into his reading. He was a stately figure, with his fine grey head and severe clean-shaven face, the scarlet of his doctor's hood upon his white surplice. The other two clerical masters were in surplices, the rest in black gowns, but not all of them were there. The chapel, which was full of boys on weekdays, was only half full on Sunday mornings, for only the boarders and a few of the day-boys came to it. The Headmaster's wife was in a stall by his side, and there

were half a dozen or so of the wives or daughters of the other masters in the seats above the others which ran along the walls on either side. The boys were in the rows below them facing one another. There was no official order in which they had to sit, but the generally recognized "swells" sat in the group of seats on the north side next to the choir, and nobody would have dared to take a seat in that block who had not attained to some eminence, real or supposed, among his fellows. Tony, always on the lookout for distinction, would have liked to sit there, and thought it possible that he might be able to do so before long. He somewhat regretted that the breaking of his voice had driven him out of the choir, for he rather fancied himself in a surplice, and had experienced a grateful sense of dignity in marching up the chapel to the strains of the organ. Dolly Rashdale, daughter of the sixth form master, had once told him at a Christmas party that she thought a good-looking boy looked best of all in a surplice, but when he had tried to wrest the statement to his own advantage, as he seemed to have been meant to do, she had said that she didn't know he had ever been in the choir, and was glad he wasn't now, for he would have spoilt the look of it.

Tony looked at Dolly Rashdale, who was on the side opposite to him, as they were singing the psalms. He had been rather keen about her during the winter season of dances, and she had seemed to be rather keen about him. But this morning she had only once looked his way, and he discovered that he didn't care. She was pretty, in a way, and was looking her best, in a white frock and a flower-decked straw hat; but her charm for him had quite evaporated, and he even faintly disapproved of her, for her eyes, whenever she lifted them from her book,

were directed towards the block of seats occupied by the "swells." There was somebody there that interested her, and it wasn't Elton, with whose name gossip had connected hers of late, for he was in the choir. Tony didn't like to see a girl taken up with boys in that way, and never with the same one for long. Maud Hopwood would never behave like that. No, Dolly Rashdale wasn't his sort, though he had liked her better than any girl a few months ago. Really, if you came to think of it, it was rather rot thinking a lot about girls, when there was so much else to think about. Maud Hopwood was different. She was a pal, and you could talk to her about everything that interested you. That she was also a very pretty girl only made it jollier to talk to her. He couldn't remember now that it had ever interested him to talk to Dolly Rashdale, except directly or indirectly to make love to her.

The service was soon over. Two of the Prefects read the lessons, but not badly enough to provoke comment. There was no sermon. Everybody sang the last hymn rather lustily, which was in the tradition. Tony was out among the first and went home quickly without waiting for anybody else. There were nearly two hours before lunch, and plenty to occupy himself with at home. The shadow of to-morrow's school was not yet over him, but he thought he would put in a little "prep," so as not to have to leave his father directly after supper.

His father was smoking a cigar, sitting in the shade of the house just outside the dining-room window, and reading Gibbon. Tony fetched his books and joined him there. He worked almost up to dinner time, and felt virtuous at having left so little to do until the evening. After all, even school work was interesting if you threw

yourself thoroughly into it; and to do it in a quiet garden in summer time, in companionship that was felt, although it was for the most part silent companionship, threw over it sensations that amounted almost to pleasure.

Over the dinner table they talked about Canada again. Mr. Dare always encouraged Tony to talk about anything that interested him, but he did not usually show himself so interested as he did now in hearing again about Robert Stenning and his conversation of the evening before. He promised Tony that he would order for him the almost forgotten book in which he had described his early experiences. He seemed to be without that vision of a completely satisfying life in a new country with which Stenning had fired Tony's imagination; but it was the first time he had ever listened with more than an indulgent smile to Tony's ideas about the way in which he would like to spend his life. The prospect of a business career in London, to which he had always sooner or later been brought as his ultimate lot in life, seemed now to be less inevitable than it had hitherto been made to appear. This change in attitude, as it seemed to be, was enough to cause Tony to ask again: "Shouldn't you really mind, father, if I wanted to do that?"

Mr. Dare answered in much the same terms as before. "If you really wanted to," he said, "I shouldn't object. You'd have it all to do for yourself. The only way I could do anything for you would be to take you into my business, and Henry and you would go on with it together afterwards. That would depend upon you too—whether you did well with it or not; all I could do would be to give you a good start, and it is the only race in which I could give you a start. That is why I have always held it up before you as what is to come. But I shouldn't

make a point of your coming into the business if you made an opening for yourself anywhere else. You're getting old enough to think about it now."

This was more definite than anything that had yet been said about Tony's future. He thought it over to himself later on, and especially as he walked to the Grange, along the road that had been so quiet and empty the night before, but was now crowded with people who had come up the hill for their Sunday afternoon walk.

He had never actually pictured himself as working in close partnership with Henry for the rest of his life, and the prospect was not alluring. He had never thought of work in the City at all, except as bringing him enough money to enable him to do other things, for which leisure would not be lacking. But his father spent most of his life there, and seldom left home for long together; and as for Henry, he lived the dullest life imaginable according to Tony's standards, and had none of the compensations of a spacious home that seemed to make his father's life worth while—but only for a man who had shed most of the desires of youth, so strong in Tony. The start was such a long way off—with two more years of school, and three or four more of Oxford after that—that it seemed to Tony that he would be a different person altogether when the time should come for him to make it. Perhaps, then, he might want to settle down to some such life as his father led, for it was obvious that men of ripe years had different ideas from those of young men; he would certainly not want to settle down to such a life as Henry led, and the chances now seemed to be that he would not go into the City at all. As for a life in the Colonies, the very fact that his father had discussed it as a possibility had ever so little taken off the edge of his

desires. He had to hold it up before himself, to recapture the glamour in which he had seen it yesterday. Then he glowed to it again, for it came to him as thrilling romance, and not as an opening for a livelihood, to be weighed against others.

There were no games at the Grange on Sunday afternoon, but there was tea on the terrace, and strolls about the garden afterwards. Tony walked with Maud and Roy Carrington, who was kind to him, and evidently liked him. He was a good-looking young man of about thirty years of age, beautifully dressed in frock coat and silk hat; he had driven all the way out from London in a hansom. He was modest about his writings, but evidently pleased with the prosperity they had brought him. He had chambers in Piccadilly, overlooking the Green Park, which was delightful in the summer, though the noise of the hansoms and the omnibuses was rather distracting for work. But there really wasn't much time for work in the height of the London season, when one never got to bed before daylight, and there was always something to do and people to go and see directly one got up again. Nor was there much time for work in the Autumn, with country house visits to be paid, and hunting and shooting occupying one's attention. He got most of his writing done in the early months of the year, when he went to the South of France, or to Italy, and soaked himself in the sunshine. It didn't do to write more than one book a year, or one made oneself cheap. He could break the back of it then, and finish it comfortably at odd times afterwards.

All this he told them, which confirmed the idea which Tony had always held, even when other ideas had come across it, that the life of a successful novelist was the best life in the world. Here was a gleaming instance of

it—a man not yet too old to enjoy life to the full, whose work was one of his pleasures, and its rewards of the sweetest.

“Tony is going to be a great novelist some day,” Maud said. “I must just go and speak to mother; you can tell him how to begin, while I’m away.”

In the conversation which followed Tony received light on the obverse side of the novelist’s career. It was not a thing that you could take lightly, said Roy Carrington. To be any good you must have descended into hell. Tony listened respectfully to this surprising statement, but it did not greatly daunt him, because it seemed to him that if Roy Carrington had ever descended into hell, he must promptly have emerged from the visit, which had left no serious marks upon him. “I suppose Mr. Stenning has had some rather bad times, hasn’t he?” he asked. “I talked to him here yesterday, and he wouldn’t advise anybody to take up writing if he could do anything else.”

“Robert Stenning? Oh, well, he’s a failure. At least he has written some good stuff, but he’s too much of a crank to go down with the public. Not that you must write down to the public—I don’t mean that—but you’ve got to play the game, so to speak, much as the writers who have made a success of it always have played it. In the first place you’ve got to learn how to write decently. Stenning can do that all right. Then you’ve got to tell a rattling good story. That’s more important still, and that’s what he never has learnt. I suppose he’d think himself above it.”

“He said the best way to learn to write was to grind away at Latin and Greek verses.”

“Yes, that’s the sort of thing he *would* say. But there’s some truth in it too. We people who have had a classical education do start with a pull, there’s no doubt about it,

because we've learnt to arrange our thoughts, and we get a feeling for language. Yes, I'll give old Stenning one for that. I'm not sure I can't use that idea, in something I'm writing now. Look here, young fellow, I'll tell you something that you must keep to yourself. I happened to strike it by writing what we call a cloak and rapier novel. I don't know whether you've read it."

"What, 'Gentlemen, the King'? Rather! I think it's ripping."

"Well, it isn't bad; but I'll tell you another secret. If people read Dumas more they wouldn't think so much of that, or the other two books I've written since. Of course I've put some good stuff into them: I've followed Stevenson as well as Dumas. Oh, I've taken pains all right. I'm not such a fool as to turn out sloppy work because I can sell it. But I don't want to go on writing cloak and rapier all the rest of my life, and what I'm doing now is a modern social comedy. That's why I'm seeing as much of life as ever I can. I'm picking up ideas every day. Oh, if only I can bring *this* off! Then you'll all have something to talk about."

Tony was enchanted at being the receptacle of this confidence, though he was not quite sure what a modern social comedy was. But Roy Carrington saved him the trouble of asking. He seemed to want only a pair of sympathetic ears, which were lent to him as he disclosed his ambition to assume the mantle laid down by Thackeray. "I believe I've got it in me," he said, "though I started on another path. Now's the time to make a bold dash, and get away from what the public expects from me. If I go on as I've begun any longer they won't let me get away from it. But if I make a success of this new departure I go up top, and can do anything I want to for the future—see? Oh, it's a great game, and I've been

lucky with it so far. I haven't had to wait to work up to my success. Look here, if you want to go in for it, I'll help you. I can soon see whether you're likely to do anything, and I'll tell you, without fear or favour. Write something and send it to me; or come and see me. I shall be in London till I go to Cowes. Come and lunch; only give me a day or two's notice, because I'm full of engagements. If you're really keen I'm sure I can help you, and I should like to. Now that's a bargain, isn't it?"

CHAPTER V

AUTHORSHIP

TONY said good-night to his father at about nine o'clock, and went up to his room, where he was accustomed to do his work. He had his own writing-table there by the window, as well as an old-fashioned bureau in a corner of the room, both of which were cherished possessions; for though he had never yet tried his hand at authorship, he had a pronounced love for all the accessories of the writer's craft. A stationer's shop never failed to attract him, and he spent a good deal of his pocket money in the one that supplied the school.

Fortunately he had left very little work to be done for the morrow, and he did not propose to do the little that he had left until he had written something that he could submit to the critical eye of Roy Carrington, or at least made a start at it.

He was in a mood of exaltation. He lit the gas in the brackets on either side of the window and sat down to his table, with some clean sheets of foolscap paper in front of him. He had no idea of what he was going to write, but felt that if he could only once get a start he could go on, writing and writing, far into the night. Dusk was creeping over the fields and woods. Only occasional voices from the road outside came to disturb the grateful sense of quiet and seclusion, and it would not be long before even these ceased, and he would have the peaceful night entirely to himself. Surely some inspira-

tion would come from surroundings so eminently suitable to authorship! It seemed that he would only have to take up the new pen which he had fitted to his holder, and the ideas would flow forth to it and cover sheet after sheet of the clean white paper, in a labour more delightful than any play had ever been.

But the ideas refused to flow, though they seemed to be jostling one another in his brain, somewhere just round the corner, eager for outlet. All his desire was to write; to write anything. If only he could get a start!

He went to his shelf of books, and took down Roy Carrington's "Gentlemen, the King." He wanted to see how he did it, for it seemed to him that he had done it remarkably well, and that talking to him about writing would have given him an insight into his methods.

He read a page or two of the first chapter, which was admirably direct. He remembered what Roy Carrington had told him—that the story was the chief thing. Here he saw him at immediate grips with his story, arousing expectation and interest, and carrying it all on with an air of spirit and resource that seemed as if they would never fail him. That they had somewhat failed him in the course of his story, that he had not quite been able to stay the course, Tony did not know. He was somehow aware that this book, though it had attained to great popularity, was not accepted as a first-class work of romantic fiction, but he did not bow to that judgment. It seemed to him to contain a new note, which made it different from other historical works that had come before it. Dumas? Yes; he had devoured "Monte Cristo," and "The Three Musketeers." They were splendid; but surely rather old-fashioned! It was this modern way of telling an exciting story, with attention to style, that so crisped it up. Tony was rather pleased with himself that

he could admire it for its style, and that he could see here and there how effects were brought about by it. The day before, he had taken "David Copperfield" from the same shelf and read over again an oft-read scene because it delighted him, but without any conscious attention to how it was written. There was no particular scene in this novel to which he felt impelled to turn. It was with a different sort of appreciation that he read over the first pages, and found them so stimulating. Oh, if he could only write like that! He was sure that he could, if he could only think of a story that would set him writing at all.

It must certainly be a novel that he would write, for it seemed to him only in a novel that there would be scope for the treatment of which he thought himself capable—the treatment that so pleased him in Roy Carrington's work. And it must be an historical novel, written with that freshness which would relieve it of the lesson-like flavour attaching to the most renowned historical novels of the past. Even Mr. Stenning had not been afraid to say that he thought Scott dull. Roy Carrington was never dull in that way. Tony couldn't understand why he wasn't contented to go on as he had begun, but was anxious to try something else. Modesty perhaps! and a becoming modesty in one who had already attained to such a success as his. Tony burned to be commended by him. He would take immense pains over whatever he should send him to criticize. He had offered to help him out of the kindness of his heart, perhaps not expecting anything much to come out of it. He would be surprised at the sample that would be submitted to him, recognizing a talent akin to his own. Perhaps it would end in collaboration, in fame and fortune, and a life free from those restrictions which any other form of work

would involve, even the desirable life in a new country, to which his thoughts had recently been turned.

So he sat before his clean sheet of foolscap and built his glistening air-castles, and the desire for plunging immediately into preparatory work for them diminished in urgency. He was not sorry when old Nanny came quietly in, ready for the little talk she usually had with him before he went to bed. He was supposed to be in bed by ten o'clock, and it was already a quarter to. Well, he would go to bed now, and get up at five o'clock so as to finish his preparation, and perhaps to make a start at the great work, which it would be delightful to write in the freshness of the early morning.

He generally told Nanny of anything that was passing through his mind, for even if she couldn't be expected to understand it all she was invariably sympathetic. He told her now that he had met a great novelist that afternoon who was going to help him to become a great novelist himself. "I shall write stories that everybody will read," he said, "and I shall dedicate the first of them to you, dearie. You can make a lot of money writing novels, and I shall have a country house in Norfolk, and you'll come and live with me there."

Nanny approved of the idea, and they talked of the sort of house they would live in. "Perhaps I could buy Merstead Hall," said Tony. "Grandfather said he thought it would be sold when Sir James died, and he's getting old now."

Nanny's father had been keeper at Merstead Hall, and his father before him, and in the churchyard were buried her fathers' fathers for many generations back. Sir James March was the last of a long line of Squires who had lived at Merstead Hall, with here and there one who had risen to some prominence in the larger world, but all

of them in unquestioned prominence in the straggling village of which they owned every hearth and chimney, and the acres of wood and meadow and water that surrounded it. To old Nanny, the Marches were a race apart, with some of the attributes of royalty, almost of godhead. It spoke much for her attachment to Tony that she accepted this particular ambition of his with only the mildest reservation. "Ay, dearie," she said, "if there's no more of the old family left! And 'twould be fitting in a way, for Sir James thought a power of your Mamma, when she was a little girl, and it was always my belief that he looked forward to her marrying Mr. Jacob, if he'd lived, poor young gentleman!"

Tony had heard this before. Sir James March's only son had been killed in Afghanistan, when his mother had been only seventeen. Probably there had been nothing to give rise to the idea in Nanny's mind but her devotion to her young mistress and the semi-feudal admiration in which she held the family at the Hall. And Nanny had never been able to see that if his mother had married anybody but his father he would not have been there himself. Perhaps his own ideas were not very clear on the matter. He had played with the idea of himself as son and heir of a Sir Jacob March, brought up among the delights of Merstead Hall, and after a career of military glory settling down there as the respected ruler of a subservient but adoring tenantry. Merstead stood to him for the romance of the English countryside. It was all the English country life that he knew, for he had never been anywhere else, except once or twice to lodgings at the seaside. But he felt himself as much of a countryman as anybody, for he had spent most of his holidays all or in part at his grandfather's Rectory; and Merstead was as typical an English village as could be found any-

where, with its self-contained life of Hall, Rectory, farm and cottage, and its slow-moving, slow-speaking inhabitants, whose lives were bound up in what went on there, and few of whom had ever been more than a few miles away from it.

To-night, with his mind open to all impressions of romance, the thought of Merstead, quiet and happy and retired, easily beckoned him away upon a new quest altogether. At this time of year, when the term was within measurable distance of its end, and he had the whole of the summer holidays coming to him, to be spent there, it was apt to colour all his thoughts. In the midst of the most lively enjoyments of Hilbury he would be seized by a nostalgic yearning for the summer peace of those loved haunts; for the old shabby roomy house, full of sun, which was as much of a home to him as his father's house; for the adventures on land and water which were his daily life there; and especially for the thrilling, all-satisfying sense of beauty and peace which would descend upon him directly he alighted from the train and immersed himself in the sights and scents and sounds of that land of quiet waters and ancient settled pursuits. Whatever else might come to him in the future, this well-tried escape into romance was immediately before him, and because his mind had not been dwelling upon it quite as much as usual it seized him now afresh with a strong sense of happiness.

And the conviction rushed upon him at the same time that here was the subject which would set his pen flowing—the life that he knew and loved in rural England, and especially in that part of it which had such abounding character of its own, with its meandering rivers and shimmering Broad, where the great black sails of the wherries and the little white sails of the yachts, seen across acres

of level marsh, meant pleasure, and business that was more romantic than any pleasure; where the speech of the country folk still held traces of their long-ago Danish origin, and they followed the same occupations with much the same methods as their forbears throughout hundreds of years; where the towers of great churches and noble ancient mansions accented the charm of villages nestling in trees, or drawn along the banks of the sluggish rivers; where nothing ever changed, or ever would change, except the people who represented it, from father to son as the years went by.

Yes, this was, after all, the life with which he found himself in accord, and which would produce for him of itself stories that it would delight him to write. A story began to form itself in his mind now, about a young girl, the daughter of the Rector of just such a place as Merstead, and the son of the Squire—just the hint of a story which would come to him when he should put his mind to it. And he saw at the same time that Nanny, of whom he had always thought as a person most concerned with his own life, had a whole range of experience of her own altogether apart from him.

"Tell me about Mamma when she was a girl and lived at Merstead Rectory," he said.

Nanny's face took on the soft loving look it always wore when she spoke of her young mistress. She told him, as she had told him before, and in much the same words, of the child she had gone to nurse when her mother had died, and of little episodes in a life that seemed never to have changed except for the changes of the seasons, until she had grown up, married, gone away, and, after a year of new happiness, died.

Tony found himself listening to the simple tale with new appreciation. Nanny had two ways of telling it.

One was to lay stress upon successive incidents; the other was by a long and detailed description of the state of life in the retired country Rectory and its immediate surroundings. It meandered gently along like one of the rivers of her native country, and Tony had sometimes become a little impatient over it, and insisted upon a sharper accent, in one or other of the little happenings that had disturbed the placid flow of existence. But to-night he did not ask for the story of his mother's breaking away from Nanny's care and nearly drowning herself in Merstead Broad; or of her elder sister—his Aunt Bertha—being so jealous of her at an earlier date that she had buried her under leaves in the wood and not told them for a long time of where she was; or of the same Aunt Bertha walking for miles on a stormy night to fetch the doctor for her, when she had the croup, though there had been no necessity for it, and they had all been far more anxious about the safety of the older child than the younger; or for any other of the stories that he knew already by heart. He was fascinated with the gentle uneventful narration of the life lived from day to day in the old Rectory, as it flowed from Nanny's lips. It pointed for him his own appreciation of that life as he knew it, slightly changing the angle from which he saw it, so that it was no longer a life so familiar that it would be difficult to disengage its peculiar significance, if one came to write about it, but something that presented definite pictures which could be laid hold upon.

No, he had never quite seen it like that before, though Nanny told him nothing new about it. Even the words and phrases that she used had their value. They conveyed and fixed, in speech, the glamour that she had always been able to throw over the pictured scene. Tony had always felt the glamour, but it delighted him to think

that now he was being helped to a way of expressing it. The decision sprang full-fledged to his mind, to write his novel as an old nurse's story of her early life in a quiet country home, making use of Nanny's language, and the faint traces of the Norfolk dialect that still lingered about her speech. He listened with a more eager attention than he had ever given her before, and his mind worked over her slow-spoken sentences, gauging and selecting and transmuting, in a delightful fervour of activity.

This mental excitement seemed to suffice for the time being. Now that he had a definite purpose in view, he was delivered from the urgent desire to set immediate pen to paper. He left the clean sheets of foolscap lying upon his table, with his new uninked pen by their side, and went to bed, though he was not yet at all sleepy. It was delightful to lie in the warm dusk hugging his great idea. He felt that he had really started on his career now, almost that he had attained to considerable success in it. He had no doubt about being able to carry out his purpose, which was much alive in him as he lay and thought about it, so that whole sentences came to him of what he would write when he settled to it, and there seemed to be no end to the inventions that thronged upon him.

He fell asleep before he was aware of being sleepy, and did not wake until past six o'clock. He had meant to get up at five, and after doing what preparation of lessons he had left over, to settle down for a good two hours to his writing. But he was unable to recapture his enthusiasm of the night before, as he lay thinking it over, and it did not seem worth while now to begin at once, with so little time in front of him, and the sense of the new working week beginning, which always depressed him when he woke on Monday mornings. He

dozed off again for another half hour, and eventually got up in a bad temper. The idea of writing a novel in term-time now seemed to him rather ridiculous. He wondered what old Broadbeans would have to say if he knew of it, which reminded him that old Broadbeans would have a good deal to say if he showed up his Latin Prose in the very sketchy state in which he had left it. This brought him to his writing-table again, and he underwent some of the pains of composition, though scarcely any of its pleasure, as he laboriously followed in the wake of Cicero and put Roy Carrington for the time being out of his mind.

CHAPTER VI

AN ENDING

ANOTHER fortnight of term went by, and the long summer holidays were within sight. Tony had subsided into his usual state of looking forward to them as the ultimate bourne of his desires. He thought hardly at all of the far future, and very little about his literary ambitions, which, however, always remained as something to which he could return at a suitable opportunity. He had been given his Third Eleven colours, after a particularly good bowling performance, and his mind was much occupied over cricket. There were also examinations immediately ahead. He was just in the position in his Form where good examination results would get him his remove, and he was anxious to come back to school next term a member of the Sixth, and a potential "swell." So he paid more attention than usual to his work, and was confirmed in his conviction that his brains were better than the average; for his place was now some way above that in which he had started the term, and he had caught up some of those who by steady work had passed him. The end of the summer term, with Speech Day, the important cricket matches, and the close of the school year marked by the largest batches of prospective "leavings," was always rather pleasurable and exciting, but its pleasures were chiefly introductory to the still greater pleasures of the holidays. Even Hilbury, and the life lived in its gay and leafy gardens seemed to be getting a little stale as the summer crept on to its full. Its semi-rural charm

would be exchanged without regret for the delights of the real country, far from the noise and smoke of towns, and the work in them with which suburban life, however attractive, was always allied.

On Saturday morning, Tony breakfasted with his father, and they talked together happily about the holidays at Merstead Rectory. They were going there in three weeks from that very day. Tony liked to travel with his father, for they went First Class, and when he went to Norfolk by himself he went Third. Besides, it was more interesting at Merstead when his father was there. The out-of-door life was always interesting, but it was sometimes a little dull in the house, with his grandfather and Aunt Bertha. At meal times, especially, it was much more lively when his father was there to talk to his grandfather, who enjoyed his society and talked in a way that he did not take the trouble to do to Tony, though he was always kind to him, and liked to have him there. And Aunt Bertha was less occupied by the pressing affairs of her life when his father was there. Both of them deferred to him. Tony was not altogether guiltless of stressing in his mind the almost bare simplicity of life in his grandfather's house, at ordinary times, as compared with the opulence of his own home. He enjoyed the simplicity for a change, but it seemed to him that his father, at Merstead Rectory, was of somewhat superior clay to his grandfather and aunt, and that they recognized it. Certainly Aunt Bertha's housekeeping was on a more generous scale when he was there, and they used the drawing-room, which was shut up at other times.

Mr. Dare seemed to be looking forward to his holiday almost as keenly as Tony. "I'm tired," he said, "I shall be glad to have nothing to do for a time."

Tony went off to school, feeling particularly pleased

with himself. His preparation had been well done, and he was water-tight from fear of impositions. He was going to play in his first match that afternoon, and felt like playing well. He was going to the Grange afterwards, and was rather hoping that Roy Carrington would be there. He had not been able to take advantage of his invitation to lunch with him, for cricket occupied his free afternoons; but he was anxious not to slip out of his mind altogether. But above all he was pleased at his father's sympathetic pleasure in their coming holiday. Their ways would be very different. Tony would be out all day long except at mealtimes; his father would spend most of his time reading in the garden, or, if it was wet, in the house. But it was the same grateful sense of country peace and freedom that delighted them both in anticipation. Tony dwelt on the response to his enthusiasm, and loved his father for it. They would be very happy together at Merstead this summer.

When he came home after school old Nanny met him in the hall and told him that his father wasn't well and hadn't gone up to town, as he had intended. He was asleep now, she thought, so Tony had better not make a noise.

"Is he in bed, then? Is he really ill? What's the matter with him?" Tony was alarmed for the moment; but Nanny didn't seem to be. "Best for him to keep quiet," she said. "Mr. and Mrs. Henry will be here soon."

Just then Mr. Dare's bell rang, and Nanny hurried up to him and immediately summoned Tony, leaning over the bannisters.

Tony was reassured when he went into his father's room and saw him lying comfortably in bed, with books on the table by his side. He smiled at him and said:

"I didn't feel very well after you had gone, so I thought I'd have a lazy day. Perhaps I shall get up this evening. What are you going to do after cricket?"

Something in his father's voice, or in the way that he looked at him touched Tony. He was thankful ever afterwards that he said at once that he was coming home to tea, although as he said it he was conscious of some disappointment, and thought that perhaps he might go to the Grange afterwards if Henry and Laura stayed to dinner, as they sometimes did on Saturdays. He lingered in the room, standing by the open window, and talked about Merstead, trying to re-arouse the emotions of the conversation at breakfast. But his father did not talk much, and before he had been there long there was a knock at the door and Henry came in, rather earlier than his wont.

Henry looked anxious, but Mr. Dare told him at once that there was very little the matter with him, and Henry's face cleared at seeing him so much like himself. They began to talk about business, and Tony slipped out of the room. He knew that Laura must be downstairs, so he went to his own room, changed his clothes and read until the gong sounded for luncheon. He did not remember afterwards that he had any forebodings at this time, and yet he was conscious of a weight on his spirits over his father's indisposition, which, however, was not quite unusual. His habits were sedentary, and he not infrequently took to his bed for a day, which usually set him right for some time. It was probably the interruption to the bright anticipations of holiday that affected Tony. But it did not affect him very deeply. As he changed into his flannels he thought more about the coming match than about anything else. Neither Henry nor Laura seemed to be at all alarmed, and in fact they did not propose to

stay to dinner, though Laura affected to make their going away dependent upon Tony's not staying out late. He was pleased to be able to tell her that he had intended to go to the Grange after cricket, but as he thought his father might like to have him at home he wasn't going. Laura said: "Oh, I'm so glad you have taken to heart what I said to you, Tony. I'm sure you'll be much happier if you think more about your father and not always so much about your own amusement"; which made him boil with indignation, though no appropriate retort occurred to him until afterwards.

The slight heaviness of spirit returned to him as he walked home some hours later. He was tired and had not acquitted himself with any great brilliance in the match, which the school had lost. And he regretted now that the pleasures of the Grange were denied him, though he did not regret his own action in denying them to himself. He was still touched by the thought of his father wanting him. That was the only difference in himself that he could think of afterwards—that he usually took it for granted that his father wanted him, but that it had come home to him that afternoon. He hoped that he would find him much better, and perhaps downstairs, when he got home, and that Henry and Laura would have gone.

But he saw Laura sitting on the terrace with a book as he went through the gates. She told him that his father was still in bed and wasn't going to get up that evening. "Dr. Riddell has been to see him," she said, "and is coming again after dinner. Henry thought we had better stay. He is talking to him now. I shouldn't go up just yet if I were you."

"No, of course you wouldn't," was Tony's inward comment as he went into the house. He would have gone

straight to his father's room, but he met Henry coming out of it.

"Don't go in," said Henry officiously. "He is just going to sleep; and don't make a noise up here."

He spoke in a whisper, and Tony answered him in a whisper, into which he managed to impart a resentful fury. "Of course I shan't make a noise," he said. "You seem to think nobody thinks about father but you." He turned away and went to his own room, wishing he could bang the door instead of closing it very quietly. But when he thought Henry was out of the way downstairs he went to find Nanny.

She was sitting quietly over her work, and the sight of her calmed Tony's irritation. "Aren't Henry and Laura making a tremendous fuss about nothing?" he asked her. "Father is not really ill, is he? Why is Dr. Riddell coming again this evening?"

"I think he's just tired, dearie," she said. "Perhaps he has been working too hard lately. Dr. Riddell said he'd just look in this evening. I expect he'll be all right again to-morrow."

"I came home on purpose to see him," said Tony resentfully. "I wonder if he's really asleep, or it's only just Henry being tiresome."

Nanny said she would creep into his room and see. She came back and told Tony that he wanted him. So Tony went into the room very quietly, and was reassured again; for his father said in his usual voice: "Well, dear boy, how did you get on in the match?"

Tony told him, standing by his bed, and he listened smiling, and saying something now and then, until Laura, who had probably heard their voices through the open window, came in with an expression of condemnation all over her face. Tony went on with his narration, as if

she were not there, but his father became restless, and said, "Well, I'll stay quiet now for a bit. Come and see me again after dinner, Tony."

Tony did not treat Laura with the rudeness that he permitted himself with Henry, though there was no alleviation to his dislike of her, while with Henry he was sometimes on quite friendly terms. But he opposed her reproachful attitude, when they got outside the room, with the same keen resentment that he had shown towards Henry. "Nanny went in very quietly, and he asked for me to go to him," he said. "He wanted to see me, and I wish you and Henry wouldn't always try to interfere between us."

Laura turned away with the usual martyred expression with which she met speeches of this sort, and no more was said. At dinner, Henry exerted himself somewhat to remove the effect of late hostilities. There was always a trace in him, when he was at his father's table, of an attitude of something like apology, as if he recognized that he and Laura did not belong there of right. Laura made up for this by an undercurrent of self-assertion, plainly enough to be perceived by Tony, though he might have found it difficult to convict her of anything in speech or behaviour that was unbecoming in the wife of the eldest son of the house. Nor would he have been able to explain why he felt himself at all times in a position of superiority to Henry. It was more than that he lived in a big house and Henry in a little one. He felt himself to be more his father's son than Henry, not only because he knew that his father loved him more, but in the right to that opulence which was part of his life and was not part of Henry's. If he had examined himself upon the subject he might have claimed some sort of superiority on account of his mother. He knew very little about

Henry's mother, but there was an enlarged photograph of her in one of the unused bedrooms, which compared very unfavourably with the crayon portrait of his own young mother which hung in his father's bedroom. She seemed to be of another class altogether. A half-sister of hers—Aunt Charlotte, as he had always called her—sometimes came to Ifield Lodge. She was a lively spinster, and had always made much of Tony, with the apparent object of commending herself to his father, whom she treated with great respect. She lived at Hastings, and seemed to be in command of money, to judge by her house, which Tony had once visited, though her presents to him were meagre. He was rather inclined to like her, but she was obviously of a lower social level than that to which he imagined himself to belong.

He talked of Merstead, and the coming holidays, during dinner. Henry and Laura both thought that it would be a good thing for Mr. Dare to have a good long rest there. "I've been trying to persuade him to get away earlier," Henry said. "If he came to the office just for one day we could fix up everything; or I could even come up and do it here with him."

The blissful idea crossed Tony's mind of the term cut short for him; but he knew that it couldn't be so, and it would not be a good thing for him either, with all that had to be done. "I suppose he doesn't want to go before the end of the term," he said.

"I think it is such a pity," said Laura in her exasperating quiet way. "It would be so good for him to get away at once. You couldn't go with him, and of course you couldn't stay here alone. But I think, perhaps, Mrs. Hawthorne might be willing to take you in until the holidays. She came in this afternoon to enquire, and I just sounded her about it."

Tony almost choked over his soup, but controlled his indignation to ask: "Why couldn't I stay here? I should be all right with Nanny."

Henry interposed with some authority. "You couldn't stay here alone," he said, "because the rules for day-boarders don't allow it. There would be nobody responsible for you."

This silenced Tony, but not Laura, who said: "As far as I understand the school rules, you have a good deal more freedom than is allowed, as it is. Henry was never allowed to go out in the evening after lock-up for the boarders, unless with his parents."

Tony suddenly felt that he didn't want an acid controversy with Laura, for which ample material would have been supplied by this speech. He hated dining down here with her and Henry, while his father was upstairs. It was a very different beginning to his weekly holiday than that to which he had looked forward. The rest of the meal passed quietly, and before it was over Dr. Riddell came in and, after drinking a glass of port and chatting with them for a few minutes, went upstairs.

Tony slipped out into the garden after dinner, so as to get away from Henry and Laura, who went into the library. He wandered about for some time, with his hands in his pockets, until a drizzling rain began to fall, which increased the discomfort of spirit under which he was labouring. The doctor had been a long time with his father. He wished he would go away, and he could go up to him, and that Henry and Laura would remove their tiresome presence, for which there was no adequate reason.

He never forgot his entrance into the hall of the house, of which the hot scent of lilies always afterwards pain-

fully reminded him. He was startled by Henry leaning over the bannisters of the landing above, and calling him in a frightened voice: "Come! Come at once!"

He raced up the stairs, his heart in his mouth, and into his father's room.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEVERING STROKE

WHEN everything was over, Tony was like a little child in his utter abandonment to his grief. Old Nanny put him to bed and sat with him as he sobbed and moaned, murmuring gentle assuagements, the tears falling down her own face the while. He held her hand, fearing that he might fall asleep and she might go away. She was the one person left to him in all the world now to love.

Presently he did fall asleep, and when he awoke it was already day. For a moment he lay awake, instantly aware that something dreadful had happened, but staving off its realization. Then the waves of sorrow washed over him again. Night and the solace of sleep were over. Life had to be faced again under the numbing weight of a loss that he thought he must feel more and more as the days went by, until he would be able to support it no longer.

And yet, by the end of that day he knew that he would get used to it in time. He resisted the feeling. It seemed disloyalty to his dear father not to be utterly miserable all the time. Henry and Laura were kind to him, neither of them exhorting him to self-control, as might have been expected of them; for their own grief was subdued, and seemed to him very like callousness. They were very busy all day, and at times almost cheerful in their business. He hated them both for not feeling more, or for not showing their feelings. It seemed to be all the more incumbent upon him to show his; but at times the source

of his tears seemed to be dried up, and then he hated himself for the thoughts that began to creep in upon him, thoughts that took for granted his father's death, and went reaching out to the world as it would be for himself without him.

On Sunday afternoon Laura went home for a few hours. Tony wished that Henry would have gone too, and left him alone with Nanny, who was his only comfort. But he regretted the thought afterwards, for Henry seemed to want to show him that he was very sorry for him; and he showed his own grief too, in a way that he had not done before, though with an evident effort at self-control.

In Tony's early childhood Henry had been very fond of him, and Tony had loved him, next to his father and to Nanny. That feeling had long ceased to exist on his side, and he thought on Henry's. But this evening the sense of protection towards his much younger brother seemed to be alive in Henry. He talked to him very kindly, and put his arm round his shoulder as they sat together.

Henry told him that their father's heart had been weak for some years, which was why he had exerted himself as little as possible physically. He had had a seizure the morning before, but the doctor had said that it was nothing to worry about, though he must be even still more careful for the future. Nothing could have been done that had not been done. The heart was just worn out. It was very fortunate that Dr. Riddell had been there when the second seizure came. Otherwise they might have thought afterwards that his life could have been saved, when actually it was past saving.

"I don't know what I shall do without him," Henry said forlornly. "I saved him all the bothers I could in

business, but I always relied on him. He was always so kind, and so—so fatherly.”

He broke into a sob, which set Tony wildly weeping again. Henry comforted him. “We mustn’t forget that we’re brothers,” he said, rather awkwardly. “I’ll look after you, Tony, and make up for it as much as I can. So will Laura.”

The mention of Laura dried Tony’s tears, which Henry’s sympathy would only have kept flowing. Yet Laura was kind too in her way, when she came back. She refrained from words of consolation of her own, but suggested that he should go to bed, and that Nanny should bring up his supper to him.

There was comfort in this simple expedient. Nanny sat with him for some time, and it did not now seem disloyal to his father to make plans with her for the future. They were childish plans enough, but he brought to them some of the eagerness with which he was accustomed to discuss all plans for the future.

They would live in a little cottage together at Merstead. They wouldn’t expect to be happy for a long time, but they would be together and out of the world. “I simply couldn’t go back to school now,” Tony said, “or be with other people. We’d have a garden where I could work hard, and by and by I should begin to write; but I couldn’t do anything like that just yet.”

Tony slept all through that night, and when he awoke next morning his sorrow was somewhat quieted. Thoughts of his father, who was lying dead so near to him, and was yet so far away, alternated with thoughts of the future, which would be lived with his memory ever fresh. His plan of the night before still held him, and he thought of it with some reference to actualities, as they presented themselves to his experience.

He supposed he would have a good deal of money—or at any rate enough to live with Nanny in the simplest possible way until he could make a living by writing. But it shocked him to find that he was thinking about that already, and indeed he could not think of it without a constant return to the sorrow and puzzlement of his father's death. It was his bruised spirit that prompted him to the vision of a quiet haven of rest, with Nanny to comfort him; and there was no disloyalty in allowing his mind to dwell upon that prospect.

But during that day and the two days that followed it, until the sharp severing stroke of the funeral, Tony was more and more drawn towards the bleak vision of the future, unwarmed by the cloak of self-indulgence that he had begun to wrap round himself. Nothing definite was said. Henry was still kind to him, and Laura left him alone—with nothing to do except to hug his misery and loneliness. But it was taken for granted that he would go back to school after the funeral, until the end of the term. Henry and Laura had taken up their abode at Ifield Lodge, and Laura behaved as if she were now the accepted mistress of the house. It had not occurred to Tony that she and Henry would come to live there, until it struck him suddenly how much she had made herself mistress over everything. He did not want to ask Henry about the future. There was a tacit assumption now that statements would be made after the funeral, and the idea grew upon him that his lot would be more dependent upon Henry's decision, and perhaps upon Laura's, than he had anticipated. Whatever might happen he did not want prematurely disclosed.

Very few people came to the house during those miserable empty days, and Tony saw none of them except Mrs. Hawthorne, who seemed to be struggling with her stiff

reserve to give him comfort. She told him how sorry Stephen and Ruth were for him, and gave him messages from them. She talked to him of his father, and extolled his kindness. That she had disapproved of his religious laxity was only allowed to appear through omission, and fortunately Tony did not notice what she left unsaid. It was a good deal for her to praise in the way that she did, and he warmed to her. It seemed to him now that Stephen, over whom he had claimed such advantages, was in a happier state than he was, with a home, and a parent upon whom he could depend.

Tony had many letters of sympathy, and among them one from Maud Hopwood, which aroused conflicting emotions in him. He seemed to be separated so utterly from the happy life that she had in some measure represented for him. But her letter gave him a warm feeling of gratitude; also a little of pride in the distinction that his loss had brought him. This feeling was increased by an unexpected letter from the Headmaster, which, though formally expressed, contained a gratifying tribute to his father. One or two of his school-fellows wrote to him, but not Mr. Broadbent. It gave him something to do to answer all his letters, but his answers were stilted and unsatisfactory to himself. Only to Maud Hopwood did he express himself with any naturalness, telling her how much he had loved his father. But even here there was an artificial note, for he said that he should never get over his loss, while he had come to wish now that the lingering circumstances of his father's death were over, and he could get back into the sunshine of life.

Tony's grandfather and aunt came from Norfolk on the day before the funeral. The old Rector was too much used to such occasions to bear himself very differently from the ordinary. He had come very seldom to London

of late years and intended to stay up for a few days after the funeral. His native cheerfulness, which he made no effort to disguise, though he kept it to a suitable key, was a tonic to Tony, now torn between the conflicting emotions of his genuine grief and his desire for the normal conditions of life. He comforted him by dwelling upon the pleasures that awaited him in the near future, pleasures upon which Tony had forbidden himself to dwell. "The holidays will soon be here," said the old man, kindly. "We'll make them as bright as we can for you. Ah, it's sad that we shan't have your dear father with us. I'd been looking forward to that. I always enjoyed his visits. He was a man who had read a lot, and thought about what he read. I always enjoyed talking to him, and rubbed off some of the rust when he came to see us. Well, he's gone now, poor fellow! You lose one after the other as you get older, but then you know you're getting near to the time when you'll meet them all again, so you rub along somehow and make the best of it."

The simple philosophy which the old man had acquired during his long, not unuseful life, though it was based upon his Christian faith, was not of the kind that commended itself to Laura, who, by her pinched-up expression and efforts to turn the conversation over the dinner table into more edifying channels, showed her innate disapproval of him. She got on better with Miss Barrett, who was willing to talk with her about parish affairs, which she seemed pretty well to control at Merstead. She was a largely built, plain-faced, plainly-dressed lady, with a confident look and straightforward sensible speech. She looked once or twice at Laura with a questioning expression, and once after a speech of hers turned to Tony, without answering it, and said something to him that had no bearing on what had gone before. There was a re-

liable strength and depth in her which was very grateful to Tony, whose sorrow was heavy upon him at this meal, almost festal, at which his father was not present. He felt none of the luxury of grief, to which he had been not altogether a stranger during the past days. He would have kept it from showing if he could, and made strong efforts to hold back the tears which came from the sense of blankness and desolation within him. He gave them vent afterwards, when his aunt got him by himself and talked to him quietly, but they were not the tears of his first abandonment, nor those of self-pity which he had afterwards encouraged. They were more of a tribute to his father than any he had hitherto shed. His soul ached for him. Nothing else mattered at that moment but his loss. He might have said then quite sincerely that he would never get over it.

But Aunt Bertha managed to comfort him, though she used none of the endearments for which he went to Nanny. These sorrows came to all of us, she said, and if we held ourselves rightly under them they strengthened us. We were all apt to think too much of our own pleasures, and perhaps too much even of our own duties; but when anybody that we loved very much died it took us out of ourselves, for our own pursuits and pleasures seemed very little to us then. In this way we could best remember the dead, by thinking less of ourselves, who were left behind for a time, and trying to continue in that way when our first sorrow was over.

There was something in this which found an answering chord in Tony's nature, in spite of the self-indulgence which tinged it. It was the anchor to which he clung during the trying ordeal of the funeral, when he had to face the world and bear himself under the eyes of many whom he knew. He thought all the time of his father,

and not of himself or of those who were looking at him. His sadness was deep, but the only tears he shed were when the earth fell upon the coffin in the grave below. But he restrained them with an effort and framed in his mind a last loving intensely messaged word of farewell.

CHAPTER VIII

REVELATIONS

THE return to the unshuttered house marked the immediate beginning of a new stage in life's journey. Even Tony felt that the time had come to lay aside some of the thoughts of which his mind had been full, and to prepare himself for whatever should be coming to him. It seemed to him now that, whatever changes there might be, they must affect his immediate outlook for the worse. For Henry and Laura there would probably be compensations. In Laura, indeed, there was a marked increase of cheerfulness as she sat at the head of the tea-table. She was still subdued in her speech, but behaved as if an irksome load were finally off her mind, and she could not wholly disguise her relief. Henry did not exhibit quite the same symptoms. There was no relief of mind to be gathered from his manner, but there was some return to his usual attitude of stiff rectitude, which he had laid aside in his treatment of Tony since their father's death. It was with no trace of unkindness, however, that he said to him, when tea was over: "I want to have a talk with you about things in general. Shall we go into the library, or shall I come up to your room?"

Tony's heart sank. He would have to face it now, whatever it was. He would have preferred to go into the garden with Henry, but it was raining heavily. He did not want to go into the library, and perhaps see Henry sitting in his father's chair. So they went up to

his room, and as they went Laura gave them a look which increased Tony's unhappiness. She might try to hide it, but he was sure that she would be pleased if he were to be disappointed in any hopes he may have entertained. Well, she shouldn't have any cause for triumph. He could, at any rate, hide what he felt from her.

Henry sat down in a chair by the window, with Tony at the writing-table, half facing him. During the conversation which followed Tony played with a pencil on his blotting-paper, making curious patterns, upon which he sometimes seemed more intent than upon their conversation.

Henry cleared his throat, and began, half apologetically. "You've been very good in not asking questions," he said. "You must have wanted to know things. I loved father, but of course it's a worse change for you than it is for me. When I say that I want to stand in his place to you as much as possible, I know I can't do it at all in one way. But I'll do everything I can until you're grown up."

But for that look of Laura's Tony might have responded to this with some warmth. He had moved some way in the direction of brotherly feeling for Henry during the past days, but there were the irritations and prejudices of years behind them. And there was Laura, the limit of whose softening during those miserable days had been to let him alone, when it would have been indecent to do anything else. He would wait to see what Henry had to tell him before committing himself to complete acceptance of his stated attitude. But he must not be unjust.

"Thanks, Henry," he said. "You've been very decent to me lately. I should like to know now what is going to happen."

"Well, we thought you'd better stay at school for an-

other year, and then come into the business. You'll be nearly eighteen. How would you like that?"

Tony hesitated. "Father always said I could go to Oxford or Cambridge if I got a scholarship," he said.

"Yes, I know he did," said Henry at once. "I've thought a lot about that—if it could be managed. But it would mean two more years at school instead of one, and three more years after that in which you wouldn't be self-supporting. I should consider it my duty to help you towards that if—if— Well, it's rather difficult to say. I don't want to blame you in any way. Sometimes you've worked very well, and of course you're clever. But it doesn't seem to me that you've shown any great bent towards a scholastic life. That's what it really comes to. It could be the only reason for making the sacrifices that would be necessary. To put it plainly—as we've got to talk plainly—I shouldn't think it right to keep you at school and send you to the varsity just to enjoy life. I think if you'll look at it fairly you'll see that Oxford or Cambridge hasn't meant much more than that to you. I don't mean that you'd be idle; but I don't see it as leading to anything particular—anything that you couldn't get in another way, without wasting four years. Do you see what I mean?"

Tony did see. He could never resist the call of reason, even when it went against himself. If only he had always worked as hard as he had been working this term! Or harder, as many others whom he knew worked! He was quite well aware that at his present rate of progress he would get nowhere near scholarship form by the end of his time at school. But he had always meant to put on a tremendous spurt, and surprise everybody. "*I would work*," he said. "I'd work harder than I've ever worked before, and keep it up."

Henry hesitated and then plumped out: "I always did work steadily. I was in the Sixth at your age. I wanted to go to Oxford—I suppose for much the same reasons as you do; and I could have got a scholarship or exhibition all right."

This was rather a new light to Tony. He knew that Henry had got into the Sixth, rather surprisingly—but plodders did attain that eminence. He had never thought of him as having any ambitions towards a University career, for he had seemed to him in his natural place as a business man. "Why didn't you?" he asked.

"Because father wanted me with him in the City. I'm only suggesting for you what I did myself. I left school at a little over seventeen, younger than you'll be after another year. There's the business to carry on. There's a good income for two in it. Father took me in, and I'm willing to take you in."

Tony saw all this too. On the face of it, it was unreasonable that he should expect Henry to give him what their father had not given to Henry, who had apparently wanted it, in the same way that he wanted it. But was he to regard Henry as standing towards him in all respects as their father had stood to Henry? "Are you my guardian?" he blurted out, but not rudely. He had an idea that people whose parents died before they were of age were always provided with guardians. And people in the position of his father left wills. No mention had yet been made of a will.

Henry cleared his throat. "I suppose I'm your legal guardian," he said. "I know that father expected me to look after you, if he died before you could look after yourself. He had known for years that he might not live long. He never talked about these things, but—well, when anybody is as much to you as he was to me, you

get to know. I want to do everything for you that he would have wanted me to do. But," he added, after a short pause, "that isn't, you see, *quite* the same thing as doing what he might have done for you himself if he had lived."

Before the pause, Tony had reflected that the reticent affection which showed in all Henry's speech about their father was a new light on him. Its sincerity could not be doubted, and it was a tie between them. But the statement that followed altered the course of his thoughts again. "Didn't father leave me anything in his will?" he asked.

The question was more decided in sound than intention. Tony knew no more about these matters than what he had read in novels, and his inexperience led him to rely upon Henry's decisions more than was apparent. But Henry seemed to welcome the question.

"You ought to know how things are," he said. "Father didn't leave a will. There was practically nothing to leave. Ours isn't a business that is run on capital. It has brought in a good income, and he has had the use of that—of the greater part of it. Some years ago he wanted to insure his life—I think probably for your benefit, though he never told me so. But the Companies wouldn't take him. It was then that I first knew that his life was very uncertain, and it made a difference in the way I—I—"

He trailed off into silence, and looked uncomfortable. "Perhaps I ought to tell you a little more," he said. "As things are, you might come to misunderstand them if I didn't. But it's rather difficult, because I might seem to be blaming father; and I'd rather be misunderstood myself than do that."

"I know you wouldn't do that," said Tony stoutly.

He reproached himself somewhat for having misunderstood Henry in the past. The assurance was due to him, but he was half-frightened at what might be coming.

"It's only that I haven't drawn up to the share that was due to me since I was taken into partnership," Henry said; "except in the year I was married. This house cost a lot to keep up. I don't think father ever knew, really, how much it did cost. I didn't want him to. I've kept the books, and he just drew what he wanted. He hardly spent anything outside this house, and nothing—hardly—on himself. It was practically everything he had, and I wanted him to have it, without worrying himself about what it cost. Laura wanted it too. The only thing I've minded it for was because she might have had more since we've been married than she has had."

Tony was not prepared to give much credit to Laura. If she had acquiesced in Henry's self-sacrifice it must have been because he had insisted on it. Tony had the feeling—for which it might have been difficult to state grounds—that Henry delivered himself to Laura's guidance in lesser affairs, but was master in the greater. But what he had told him threw light on many things, and among others upon Laura's hardly veiled jealousy of himself, for which there was some excuse if she had seen him sharing in the opulence for the sake of which she suffered deprivation, and even holding himself superior to her on account of it. He did not want this side of the question emphasized for him. He was unpleasantly affected by the remembrance of certain passages between them, and his general feeling of discomfort was heavy upon him.

"I didn't know it was anything like that," he said, half in apology for himself.

"No; you couldn't, of course. I've known it must be a great disappointment to you, too, though you can't have formed any definite expectations, I suppose, at your age. But you see how it is, don't you? There's the business. It's almost entirely a personal one. If I were to die to-morrow anybody could step in, and get what we've been doing. What I mean is that there's no *share* in it that father might have left, that could be turned into money. I'm the firm now, and it's just that I'm in the position to get the work. I could take in a partner, and I should do that if it weren't for you. But I want to take you in, as father took me in. Only, if I keep it open for you, it would hardly be fair to expect me to go on working for three or four years longer, and to—to pay—in part at any rate—for you to go to the varsity, besides, would it?"

"Oh, no." That vision at any rate had passed away. There remained other visions that had come to Tony before his father's death, but which seemed equally to have lost their brightness now. It was without any conviction that he said: "Father and I did talk about my going to British Columbia, or somewhere like that, not long ago."

"Yes, he told me about that," said Henry at once. "When you were older, if you really wanted it, he thought it mightn't be a bad thing; but he didn't think about it except as one of the ideas that you'd got into your head for a time—that any boy might get into his head. He did want to see you settled—I know that; or at least to think that you would be settled; and of course he knew that whatever you did it would depend on yourself. He thought it was a good thing for you to think about *anything* for yourself in that way—to learn to take life seriously. But it was just an idea, wasn't it? You

thought you might like to go abroad, perhaps after you'd been to Oxford?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Tony with unwonted meekness. He had no such desire now. He was feeling very forlorn, and young, and helpless. Henry's protection seemed to be all that was left for him to cling to, and it was for him to fall in with Henry's decisions.

Henry seemed to have finished what he had to say for the present, and Tony kept silence for a time. He was very unhappy. What Henry had told him had some effect upon the estimation in which he had held his father. He was not experienced enough to have felt any considerable shock of surprise at learning that a man who had lived in the way that his father had should have been entirely dependent upon the income made from year to year, with even that overspent; but there was the fact that with his death the safe resources of his personality had come entirely to an end. Nothing in Tony's life now would be drawn from him, to whom he had looked for everything. Everything would come from Henry, who now filled all his place; and he had had the notion of Henry as being of inferior clay. But the house of his own state, in which he had taken foolish pride, was toppling about his ears.

"Are we going on living here?" he asked.

"No," said Henry, and hesitated. "There's a good deal to get straight," he said, and passed on hurriedly. "We're going to stay where we are at present. By and by we shall make a change, perhaps. It's a question now—if you stay on at school for another year, as I want you to—you could go to one of the boarding houses, or Mrs. Hawthorne says she will take you in during term time. I think it would be better if— But which would you rather do yourself?"

Before his father's death Tony would have asked unhesitatingly to be a boarder, if circumstances had arisen to necessitate the choice. A boarder had an advantage in social value over a day-boy, and life in the three Houses had other points to recommend it. Now he replied as unhesitatingly in favour of Ifield Cottage. He had travelled so far from his previous estimates that a state which had seemed to him insupportable in comparison with his own now appeared in the warm light of a home, all to be desired.

"I'm glad you'd rather do that," said Henry brightening. "Mrs. Hawthorne is very kind, though of course she's strict. Mr. and Miss Barrett want you to go to Merstead for the whole of the holidays, and next Christmas and Easter too. You'd rather do that than anything, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. Aunt Bertha said they wanted me."

"Neither of us has many relations," said Henry in parenthesis. "Aunt Charlotte is my only one who counts for anything, and your grandfather and aunt yours. But I'm glad you've got them to go to. I ought to tell you, perhaps, that father always paid for you to go there, and of course when he went there himself. I should have offered to do the same, but I saw Miss Barrett wouldn't like it. I think you ought . . ."

"What were you going to say?" asked Tony, as he left off again.

"Well, I'm sure it isn't necessary to say it. Probably they live more economically than you've been accustomed to, or than they did when you and father were there. You'll do all you can to fall in, I'm sure."

"Oh, yes." There was nothing left to him now of his assumptions of superiority over anybody. Henry, on whom he had unreasonably looked down, was the source

from which his subsistence would henceforth draw; the Hawthornes had an established home, while he had none any longer; Merstead only was left to represent the brightness and solace of life, as it had been; for an economy in the way of living there didn't matter at all.

The tears fell down his cheeks, as he cried, silently, with a hopeless feeling of life saddened and uninviting. But at least there was the immediate comfort of Merstead to look forward to.

"I wish I could go back with grandfather and Aunt Bertha," he said. "I can't bear the idea of going back to school to-morrow, with all the others."

He had not been without visions of himself going back to school, an object of sympathetic interest to everybody. But such thoughts as those were bred of his reactions, and were absent from him when the reality of his loss weighed heavy.

Tears came into Henry's eyes. He had never been more under the influence of his revived emotions towards his little brother, whose sorrows he had comforted in his childhood. "Poor old boy!" he said. "I know how you must be feeling about it. I did say to Laura that I thought you needn't go back till next term. But don't you think it would be better to face it now? It's important, you see . . . examinations. You'll want to take a good place next term. If you'd make up your *own* mind to it . . .! What I'm so sorry about—for you—is that you've got to face things so early. I'll do all I can to help you, but . . . Well, you've *got* to face them, Tony . . . rely on yourself, you know. Wouldn't it be better for you to go back? Well, now, look here! You shall decide for yourself."

"Yes, I'll go, Henry," said Tony, crying now unrestrainedly, as much under the influence of Henry's kind-

ness of speech and manner as of his own blank misery. "I'll stick it out; and it won't be for much longer. Do you mind if I go to bed now? I've got a headache, but I shall be all right to-morrow. Thanks awfully, Henry, for being so kind."

Henry kissed him, which he hadn't done for years. "I'll tell Nanny to come to you," he said, "and she'll bring you up some supper." Then he limped out of the room.

CHAPTER IX

MERSTEAD RECTORY

THE first morning that Tony awoke, very early, at Merstead Rectory, it was with a clear sense of happiness, such as had not come to him since before his father's death. He had often experienced that sense of peace and freedom, waking up in this room in the early days of his holidays, but now, though it was not less in emotional power, it was of a different quality. The change from the life he had left to the life upon which he was entering was far greater, but the exuberance with which he had welcomed it had given place to a feeling of deep gratitude and an almost fearful acceptance of his circumstances; for it seemed so likely that further testing of them would bring him the pain to which his waking thoughts had accustomed him, as well as the pleasure which this awaking had first brought him.

But as he lay quite still, and allowed the influences surrounding him to play upon his consciousness, his happiness grew. It was real, this waking to the grey summer dawn, in the familiar room whose windows opened on to the secluded yet spacious solace of the untroubled country; and the days and weeks were before him, not to be taken away, nor to be spoilt by the pain that had lain all about the paths he had trodden until now.

For it had been worse than he had thought, going back to school, and carrying on his life at Hilbury as if nothing had happened to change all the savour of it.

He had learnt very early that those long three weeks before the term closed would only be tolerable if he hid his private griefs and immersed himself in it as if they had not been—the hard lesson that sympathy with a loss such as his turns to shrinking if it is shown in a way to affect the self-complacency of others. On the first morning of his return, his class fellows were all rather gloomily polite to him, and one or two ventured awkward words of condolence. Mr. Broadbent, though he said nothing, showed in some indefinable way that he wished to spare him. He was made an object of half-furtive regard in chapel by those who knew who he was and what had recently happened to him. Certainly he was for a time in the public eye, but as certainly there was no satisfaction in that. Afterwards he seemed to be even a little avoided. A group of boys would break off their conversation as he approached, and resume it in a different key; and then perhaps drift away. And yet they were sorry for him and showed it in ways allowed by their code. Several of them took some pains to help him towards catching up with the work of the week he had lost. When he went down to the Field for the first time, his bowling was made more of than it would have been otherwise. He was put on early, and kept on after his performance showed that it would have been of advantage to take him off. There was perhaps even a tendency on the part of the batsmen not to punish a bad ball too severely. But there was an obvious feeling of relief when he showed after a day or two that he expected to be treated in normal fashion, and the tension relaxed after Mr. Broadbent had given him lines—rather less than the usual number—for a lesson badly prepared.

He could be quite natural only with Stephen Hawthorne, who in spite of his usual clumsiness of speech had

managed to say just the right thing when they walked to school together on the first morning.

Tony had gone out early and hung about until Stephen appeared. Stephen came out whistling, but left off when he saw his friend. He shook hands. "Awfully glad you're coming back," he said. "Rather beastly for you, but everybody's sorry."

This was all right so far; but Mr. Dare had shown great kindness to Stephen. Something more was due from him than a putting aside of his death.

They walked on. "I blubbed when I heard of it," said Stephen. "I can only just remember my own pater, but I should think he must have been rather like yours."

There had been no two men less alike, but the tribute was understood. Tony could talk to Stephen about his father now, and often did so during the time that followed.

His school work became his chief refuge. How different it was for him, when the releasing bell sounded, to go home to Ifield Lodge to have his mid-day meal with Laura instead of with Nanny, and his evening meal with Henry and Laura instead of his father! He knew that Laura was on the lookout, and he wouldn't give her any handles. He would have liked, after a bit, to go to the Hopwoods or to others of his friends, outside his times for cricket; but she would have expressed herself shocked at his wanting to amuse himself in general society so soon after his father's death. Her fault-finding eye was upon him, whatever he did, at home, unless he was working at his lessons; so he worked at them for longer than he had ever done, so as to get away from her. Even then she would make excuses to come into his room, and the only occasion he actually gave her for rebuke was when she found him once reading a novel there. The result

of this special application was that he caught up completely what he had lost during the week he had been away from school, and did very well in his examinations. He had had occasional spurts of hard work before this, and found satisfaction in it, but it was the first time that he had experienced the solace of work as something real in itself, when everything else about him was unhappy and uncertain. It was the first time that he had ever been unhappy for long together.

Henry and Laura were to live at Ifield Lodge until they vacated it altogether at the end of the September quarter. Tony had gathered from Henry that their idea was to live for that time in the way that life had always been lived there, and Laura stressed this intention with reference to Tony himself. At least as long as he was there they didn't want him to feel more change than was necessary. But oh, the change that he did feel! Laura's housekeeping was pinched and saving. That wouldn't have mattered; but two of the servants gave immediate notice, and there was a sense of strain and dissatisfaction over the whole household, where everything had gone so smoothly. Perhaps Henry did make an effort to carry out the spirit of this good intention, for Tony came to understand that directly he went away for the holidays they would begin the task of breaking up the home, but until then it was to be talked about as little as possible. But even Henry could not avoid the subject altogether, and Laura did so in a self-righteous manner that made her avoidance of it more painful than if she had made it her chief subject of conversation. They were both, naturally enough, interested in their own future, which would be greatly expanded. Their attitude towards life set them moving apart from Tony of itself, and Henry's revived tenderness towards him was not enough to coun-

terbalance this separative effect. There was no essential sympathy of taste or outlook between them. When Tony said good-bye to Ifield Lodge he felt more lonely and forsaken than at any time since his father's death. He was too dispirited, even, to take much pleasure in his coming emancipation. As he travelled down to Norfolk with old Nanny, who was going back to end her days in her native village, his mood of depression was still heavy upon him. The prospect of peace and freedom at which he grasped moved him to less enjoyment than he had ever felt before upon this journey; and sadness and deadness of spirit lay upon him during his first evening with his grandfather and aunt, though he felt the consolation of being with them.

But during the night his unhappiness seemed to have been lifted from him altogether. He thought about his father tenderly, but saw that the sorrow which his death had brought him was not to overshadow all his life. The world was still a happy place, and he was going to be happy in it, without that sense of disloyalty that had hitherto come to him whenever he had imagined himself as being completely happy again. The weight was lifted at last. He was quietly and deeply happy now as he fell off to sleep again, and eagerly happy when he awoke an hour or two later with the risen sun flooding his room, and the first day of his holidays all before him.

He lay still for a time drinking it all in. This room was a part of his life's experience, almost as much so as his room at Ifield Lodge, which was his no longer and which he would probably never see again. He had slept in it for years past whenever he was at Merstead Rectory, and it had very rarely been occupied by anyone else. It was a large room, facing East on to the main lawn of the garden, which was closed in by a thick belt of elms, in the

upper branches of which he could see the now deserted rooks' nests as he lay in bed. The rooks had first waked him with their clamour, as he loved to be awakened at Merstead in the early days of his summer holidays, before he became used to them; but now most of them had departed for their feeding grounds, and only a few remained, with nothing apparently in hand but an occasional argument.

The room was sparsely furnished. There was a worn carpet over part of the uneven floor, the boards of which were scrubbed to a bleached freshness. The sun had faded the wall-paper to a mere pale device wherever it had touched it, but the rosebuds and ribbons of the stiff glazed chintz of window curtains and petticoated dressing-table had successfully resisted its onslaughts. The four-posted bed was hung with clean dimity. There was a tallboy chest of drawers, three mahogany caned chairs, and a white-painted washstand. That was all the furniture, but more would have taken away from the pleasant countrylike bareness of the room. There was a smell of lavender about it. On the walls were a few indifferently executed water-colours; on the mantelpiece two hideous vases of red glass with lustre pendants, and a mahogany-cased clock, which had given up the struggle at ten minutes to twelve on a day, or night, before Tony could remember; on the white dressing-table a pink and white toilet-set, which included a sort of china tree-trunk upon the branches of which rings could be hung. How comforting it all was, in its settled and restful familiarity!

The church clock struck six, with a pause between each stroke, as if it were insisting upon its announcement being taken seriously. Presently the anvil from the forge in the village began to ring, and soon afterwards a faint

sound of hammering came from the boat-building yard a quarter of a mile away. This brought Tony out of bed with a leap. Merstead was beginning the work of its long summer day, and the work done at Merstead was of such interest to him that he must lose no time in taking his part in it, which was chiefly that of looking on, though not entirely so.

Mary, the cross old cook, who was not always cross to Tony, was already in her kitchen, as he went downstairs, and gave him a hunk of crusty bread to stay him until breakfast time. He had a word with Tabitha, the other maid, as he went through the hall. She had been one of the school children who had come up to sing carols on the previous Christmas-Eve, but looked quite different now, with her hair screwed up and her print skirt down to her ankles. She was the daughter of Bob Cutting, who had the boat yard for which Tony was bound, and he had been rather more friendly with her than with the other children, though he was more or less friendly with all of them.

"Well, Tabby!" he said. "How do you like being out in service?"

She said that she liked it, smiling at him, and waiting for more. But he felt suddenly awkward with her. She must have been less than fourteen, but she was more like a little woman than a child now, and was already doing a woman's work. "I'm going down to the yard," he said.

He stopped for a moment to look at the long weather-glass which hung on the wall beside the print of the Duke of Wellington in his robes as Chancellor of Oxford University. The hall was square and low-ceiled, and floored with a much-worn oilcloth. There were pegs for hats and coats in it, and a rack for walking-sticks. Besides the

weather-glass and the print in its broad maple-frame there was only a church calendar pinned on to the wall. The door stood wide open to the pillared portico and framed the sunny garden picture outside. The air was deliciously cool and fresh as Tony went out, though there was promise of a hot day. Ben, the old brown retriever, came lumbering up to him as he went round through the disused stable-yard, with ecstatic contortions of his matted body. Tony made a great fuss with him, for he had forgotten about him until this moment, and yet he was part of the comforting familiarity in which he was revelling. Ben accompanied him for fifty yards or so, with the air of never leaving his side until the end of time, and then turned and walked back to his kennel. Tony called him, but he only wagged his tail, without looking round. His emotions were short-lived now, except the desire to doze in the sun.

Almost immediately opposite the Rectory gate was the imposing entrance to the park of Merstead Hall. A corner of the Elizabethan house, which was not far away, could be seen through the trees. The Church, the Hall, and the Rectory seemed to be holding themselves aristocratically aloof from the more humble dwellings of the village, which did not begin until the high park wall had run for some distance down the road and ended in the stable buildings and yard. These were some distance from the Hall, but conveniently near the Merstead Arms, which stood at the top of the single village street, half facing it across a strip of green, with a watchful welcoming air. The buildings on either side of the street were mostly old red-brick cottages; but there was also the forge, one or two shops, another smaller inn, and the ugly white-brick buildings of the school behind its grav-

elled playground. The village street was not remarkably picturesque, for whatever gardens went with the cottages were mostly behind them, but the school was the only new building in it, and when that was passed it straggled away with a right-hand bend to more sparsely built habitations which had the true flavour of country repose, with their roofs mostly of reed thatch, their gardens bright with flowers behind the wooden palings and little rickety gates, and the great trunks of overshadowing elms disputing the ground with them.

The fresh air of the morning was sweet in Tony's nostrils as he hurried past these cottages, at one or two of which he waved greetings to friendly matrons busy with their household duties. He had no time to stay now, for he was eagerly snuffing up another scent that came to him as he neared the waters of the Broad, towards which the life of this small village seemed mostly to tend.

It was not like the stimulating smell of the seashore; in itself it was not perhaps even pleasant to the sense; but it stood for so much of interest and happiness that it was as sweet to him as incense.

He turned off the high road and went down a lane under the trees to the boat yard; and here there was the smell of tar and ropes and saw-dust to conflict with that of unsalt water faintly tinged with decaying vegetation. The shining spaces of the Broad could be seen between the wooden sheds that ran alongside the staith. A yacht was already hoisting sail for an early start, but the masts and cross-trees of two other yachts and the tall trunk-like mast of a wherry rose above the tarred roofs. This was the busiest time of the year for pleasure-cruising. Merstead Broad lay away from the more frequented parts of that maze of waters which had not long

since been discovered by the holiday-making crowd. A wherry and three yachts tying up to this wharf for the night stretched its capacity to the utmost.

Bob Cutting, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, was already as busy as he could be at this early hour of the morning, but he had a cordial greeting for Tony, and his candid eyes took on an expression of genuine sympathy as he said a word to him about his father's death. It was only a word, and Tony was immediately at work with him upon the wherry, which was being fitted out for a party coming to take possession of her the next day.

The *Norfolk Beauty* was Cutting's own. During the winter months she carried merchandise up and down the rivers in the capacious hold that left only a little room for the accommodation of the two men who sailed her. But wherry-owners were already beginning to adapt their boats for summer cruising, which brought them more money than freight-carrying. Wherries were beginning to be built and elaborately fitted out for nothing but pleasure cruises, but for the most part fittings were adapted to the freight-carriers and taken out when the summer was over. A large wherry would accommodate eight passengers, and more at a pinch, besides the two men who sailed her and accomplished miracles of cooking in their cumbered fore-castle. The space available was usually divided into one large cabin and one small one, fitted up comfortably enough for a week or a fortnight of simple living. Sometimes a family would hire them, more generally a group of young men from the City or from the Universities. They let at a good price, but divided up it would come to a good deal less than the cost of sea-side lodgings, with much more to show for it in pleasure and variety.

Cutting had hitherto held out against the holiday in-

vasion. Tony was familiar enough with his scornful diatribes, directed more especially against the ignorance of amateur sailors. The *Norfolk Beauty* should never do anything but honest carrying. She was the pride of Cutting's heart. He had built her himself, and for some years she had brought him in a good return at her legitimate trade. Even last Easter he had told Tony that he had refused a good offer from a firm which specialized in this business of fitting cut wherries for summer hiring. There wasn't enough money to tempt him to do it. But here he was now, as busy and interested as possible, getting ready for a party of young men of the sort he had always inveighed against as spoiling the Broads, and with no apology for his change of attitude either. Tony followed him on to the wherry and into the cabin, the furnishings and arrangements of which he pointed out with as much pride as if he had never talked about shaming a boat "like dressing up a man in women's clothes."

Tony was fascinated. He had never been on a passenger wherry before, though he had often wanted to see what they were like. It was plain enough, though convenient and comfortable, with the cushioned lockers running along the sides under the rows of lights, the fixed folding table in the middle with the swinging lamp above it, the racks on the end partitions. The inner cabin had two regular ship's bunks, with drawers beneath them, and a shut-up washstand with a looking-glass above it. "A room fit for any lady in the land!" said Cutting proudly, and showed him his equipment of new red blankets, with "Norfolk Beauty" worked on them, and thick downy pillows. There were sheets, too, he said, for the ladies' cabin, but they wouldn't be wanted for this hiring. Oh, he'd taken a pride in doing it well. His plate and crockery and glass were all new, and his cook-

ing utensils too. There wasn't a better found wherry sailing from Wroxham or Yarmouth or anywhere else. He was thinking of building another one during the winter. Folks were making money by it, and he didn't see why he shouldn't. But he mustn't stand there talking, or they'd never get finished in time. Where was young Bob? Drat the boy! He was never there when he was wanted.

Tony offered his services in place of the delinquent young Bob, who presently turned up with a grin on his face, and turned to with a will. He had gone off for a morning dip, and as they all worked together his father expressed his astonishment at this strange taste on his part, which indeed was quite unusual for a youth in his walk of life. Bob Cutting himself had had to do with the water all his life, but had never willingly immersed himself in it; there were very few watermen in that part of the world who knew how to swim.

How happy it made Tony to listen to his racy speech, and to hear the same things said as he had heard a dozen times before! And how he enjoyed setting about the little job that Cutting gave him to do, and to feel that he was doing something useful, with the sun shining on the water rippling under a fresh breeze, and all the world beautiful and untroubled around him. Cutting and young Bob went off to breakfast at seven o'clock. Tony was asked to join them, but breakfast at the Rectory was at eight o'clock, and he would have time for a bathe before he went back to it.

He bathed from the wherry, and sat in the sun afterwards and let the fresh morning wind play upon his body. The yacht that had sailed as he came down was reaching down the river now; he could see her framed between the trees at the lower end of the Broad. One of the two that

lay at the staith belonged to Cutting, and a party was coming to join her, as well as one for the wherry, on the next day. The other yacht began to show signs of life as Tony sat basking in the sun. A man came out of the cabin, yawned prodigiously, stripped off his pyjamas, and plopped into the water. Immediately after two other men came out and followed his example in every particular. They were none of them very young, or they would probably not have been beginning their day at this hour, and missing the early breeze, which was already dying away. But they were sailing their boat themselves, and as Tony left the staith one of them came off the boat with a jug in his hand and asked him where he could get milk. He was dressed in a shirt and a pair of old flannel trousers, much rolled up, and a pair of canvas shoes on his bare feet. Tony walked up the lane with him and directed him to a farm. He said the three of them had come from London the week before, and were returning at the end of the following week. "Half of it gone!" he grumbled. "I should be quite happy living this life all the summer. I suppose you belong here, don't you?"

Tony told him that he was spending his holidays with his grandfather—at the Rectory.

"Oh, you're at school still," he said. "It's twenty years since I was at school; but if I had my time over again I'm hanged if I'd make my living working on an office stool. A fortnight of this, and the rest of the year going in and out of the City! It isn't good enough."

This interested Tony. "What would you do?" he asked.

"Well, I had a chance of going out to Australia when I was about your age. I wish I'd taken it."

"Couldn't you go now, if you wanted to?"

He laughed good-humouredly. "There's the missus and the kid," he said. "I've got to stick to it for life now."

"That's the farm," said Tony, as they came to the road, where their ways diverged.

"Well, thank you for showing it to me. In return I'll give you a bit of advice. If you can do anything else in the world, don't go into an office."

CHAPTER X

POVERTY

BREAKFAST at Merstead Rectory was the simplest of meals. There had been more variety when Tony had stayed there before, and far more when his father had been with him. He came to recognize later that house-keeping was a very carefully adjusted science on the part of his aunt, that poverty was more than comparative at Merstead Rectory, and it was no figure of speech that every penny made a difference. He was not old enough or experienced enough to estimate the real achievement of life there, which was to make poverty a friend instead of an enemy, but he saw his grandfather and his aunt cheerful and contented with their lot, and it had its effect on him.

The old Rector, in clothes much worn, but very clean and well cared-for, read prayers, at which the two maids were present, as if he enjoyed the exercise with which the day's duties and pleasures opened for him. During the few minutes in which they waited for breakfast to be brought in he stood with his thin, slightly trembling hand upon Tony's shoulder by the open window, and talked as if he were as much interested in what lay before the boy as if he could take part in it himself. He knew all about Bob Cutting's change of front, and laughed at it. He thought it a good thing that holiday traffic should be coming to the Broads, but had some regrets over the passing of old customs. "Not so many years ago," he said, "you could ask anybody to put you across a river ;

now they would expect to be paid for it. Where there's money people are apt to get greedy. Still, I've known some hard times for people in these parts. Strangers coming will make a lot of difference to some."

He was nearly eighty years old. He had been born at a Rectory not many miles away, and spent all his life in this part of the country, except for the early years of school and university. He could tell fascinating stories of sport, on land and water, as it had been practised in his youth, and was a mine of lore about birds. His active participation in field sports had ceased long ago, but the observation of bird life was still one of his hobbies. As they stood at the window his keen old eyes were on the alert, and he broke off twice in what he was saying to point out some bird activity that Tony would never have noticed for himself. At the end of his long life, when it was incumbent upon him to spend much of his time indoors, he had set himself the pleasant task of renewing his acquaintance with the Greek and Latin classics. "Friday is one of my clear mornings for it," he said cheerfully. "Oh, I always look forward to Tuesday and Friday mornings. They are for Greek. I'm reading 'Ion' now—a very interesting play. But you wouldn't believe how rusty I found myself. Of course I've always kept up my Greek Testament, but— Well, I tell you, Tony, I have to use a lexicon and a grammar, just as if I were at school again. If you'd like to read a Greek play with me these holidays—but we won't talk about that yet, eh? Had enough of Greek and Latin for the present, I dare say."

Tony had had quite enough of those languages for the present, but it occurred to him that it might be a good thing to accept his grandfather's offer later on. If he could find out what they were going to do in the Sixth

next term, and he could get ahead with it, his path would be made easy for him.

He went into the old man's study with him after breakfast. It was a rather small, rather dark room, but gratefully cool and restful on this hot summer morning. Its furniture and appointments were old and shabby, but it contained everything that its owner wanted for his indoor pursuits. There was a cumbrous desk with drawers and labelled pigeon-holes, full of papers, and two orderly little piles of the books which he used every day. There was a reading-chair with a book-rest by the fireplace. The walls were lined for the most part with bookshelves, and Tony had to be shown some of the old man's treasured possessions before he left him.

"I've never been able to spend more than a few pounds on books," he said, "sometimes not even that; but you see I've got together quite a nice little library. Nothing of very much value, perhaps, to sell again, but I've never bought a book that I didn't want to read more than once, or to have to refer to. That's the best way of it, I think, when you can't buy many books. If I never bought any more, I should have plenty to read now. Your dear father gave me this one and a good many more. Nearly all the nice bindings you see he gave me, except the few prizes; I could never afford to go in for bindings myself, though I like them. But it's quite a nice little library, isn't it? You can come and read here on wet days, if you like. You won't disturb me; in fact I like company when I'm reading, or doing my lessons, as your Aunt Bertha calls it. You won't be an old man for many long years to come, but it's a very good thing to get into the way of reading when you're young. I always did like it, and I'm glad I cultivated the taste, now that I can't get about quite as much as I used to."

It was an attractive picture of contented old age, held out to the boy who would not be old for many long years to come, but already had some of the tastes which enabled him to appreciate it. His grandfather had played his part in life. There were reminders of his youth and active manhood in this room—the school prizes on his shelves, an old Cambridge almanac with an engraving of his college over the mantelpiece, a muzzle-loading gun and one or two fishing-rods in a corner. He had loved and been loved, married and had children, mourned the loss of wife and child. His presentation to this modest living over forty years before must have been an exciting event in his life, and the installation of a home sufficient to his needs. There must have been much weighing of ways and means to provide at the outset what was barely necessary; but difficulties had been overcome, and gradually, on the meagre income, additions had been made, so that in time there was nothing wanted for the orderly course of a life suited to the needs and duties and station of those who lived it there. The life had been full, and was full still, though it was rounding to its end.

Miss Barrett's life was full too. Perhaps the daily necessity of adjusting the needs of life to an income barely sufficient to provide them had become in itself an occupation as interesting as another. Certainly the lack of means was no burden to her; her work was done, and provision was made every day, in a spirit of calm diligence, admirably free from the worry and bustle that so often accompany such efforts. Many men with an income twice and three times as great as that of the old Rector of Merstead had less enjoyment out of it than he had. No questions of money ever disturbed the contentment in which he lived, and her freedom was almost as great, for its bounds were firmly established.

Her life would have been full enough for most women if she had had only the ordering of her home life to consider. But she had the affairs of the whole village to interest her besides. She was the only lady resident in it, for Sir James March lived alone at the Hall. She was the chatelaine. It was not an easy task to get money out of him, where money was wanted, but it was a task she sometimes had to perform, and she took it cheerfully, with the rest of her duties. Wives and mothers came to her in their difficulties. She was firm, but she was not hard. She would never have children of her own, but she had come to be the mother of all the parish.

As his grandfather was showing Tony his books after breakfast, he said: "I've always thought I should like to leave my books to you, Tony. You shall have some of them, but don't expect too much. Your aunt will have to decide it. It will be a question of money for her, you see. They're worth something now, these books, and there won't be very much besides."

With his understanding sharpened by his late experiences, Tony saw that his aunt was dependent for all the circumstances which she turned to such good account upon the life of her father. When he died, or if he lived so long that age would incapacitate him for his work, it would all come to an end for her. This entire change of life, always drawing nearer, must have been very present to her thoughts. What would she do? She must have some plans in her wise resourceful head. Whatever they were, they did not interfere with her grasp of the present, which was lived from day to day as if it were her permanent lot.

When his grandfather released him and settled down to his morning's reading, Tony went out to find his aunt, who was busy with her chickens. He had intended to go

straight down to the Broad again, but the idea was beginning to form itself in his mind that if he was to make his home at the Rectory for nearly two months he ought to do something towards keeping that simple yet complicated existence going. The bare sufficiency of the breakfast table and his supper of the night before had reminded him of Henry's warning, that his living there as a guest would put some strain upon the resources of the household. His frame of mind was humble and grateful. He was no longer the visitor from a rich and luxurious home, who conferred something in the nature of a benefit by taking part in this more restricted existence. He was in some respects a burden upon it; yet he had been received with a welcome warmer than ever. It was himself who was welcomed. What he had brought with him, and brought no longer, had given less pleasure than the opportunity now for supporting and making him happy would give to his aunt's generous nature. He must show himself worthy of it by making himself at one with her in what was necessary for the life he was sharing. She would like nothing better than that, he knew, if he did it as if he liked it, and not as if conferring a favour by sacrificing his leisure.

She was mixing meal in one of the outhouses, her dress protected by a workmanlike apron, a print sunbonnet on her head. There was no man employed at Merstead Rectory. Even the kitchen garden was cultivated by the three women, now that the old Rector was too old to occupy himself with it. Tony had sometimes helped his aunt in her outdoor activities before, chiefly for the sake of her company; for they had always been very cheerful and friendly together. But the little work he had done had never interfered with whatever outdoor enjoyments had presented themselves to him. He thought

he would not offer to take any regular duties upon himself, at any rate now, but watch for opportunities of making himself useful, and seize upon them, doing always a little more until he became one of the mainstays of the house. His aspiring nature led him to such flights of fancy, and his good intentions were enough to put him into a pleasant humour with himself. But he did mean to do what he could, and knew enough about himself to be prepared for a lessening of inclination in days to come, which he must meet by increased determination.

Novelty sufficed to keep him going busily and happily for an hour on this first morning, with the poultry, the fruit, and the vegetables. He knew that his aunt liked to have him with her, and was pleased that he liked to keep her company. He did like it. She was the only person left to him now of the older generation with whom he felt completely at home, and he revelled in the feeling of affection she aroused in him, after the veiled asperities which had been the note of his intercourse with Laura, and the effort to preserve the better understanding at which he had arrived with Henry. The sense of happy freedom was about him too, even in the poultry yard and the wall-enclosed kitchen garden, as much as if he had been sailing on the Broad, as he presently proposed to do, if there was wind enough to fill a sail. To do something in the country was the right way to enjoy it. The blue sky of summer and the full dark leafage of the trees, the profuse growth of flower and fruit, giving back in sweetness and colour what they had drawn from the soil and the sun, the soil itself teeming with the elements of life—they all meant more when they played upon your consciousness as it were indirectly. They would be remembered with more pleasure so than if you had been idling among them.

Tony went to see old Nanny on his way to the Broad. She had come to live with a niece, whose husband worked in the gardens of the Hall. Already she seemed to have shed something of the effect of her long years of comfortable service, and to have reverted to the country-woman whose natural state was the life of the cottage. She was busying herself with household tasks such as she had never had to put her hand to at Ifield Lodge, and her speech seemed more noticeably tinged with her native Doric. She was very pleased to see Tony, but he understood that a more suitable time for the frequent visits he meant to pay her would be in the afternoon, when the rougher household duties had been accomplished. He was quick enough to see this, and continued on his way after little more than a greeting, promising to come again that very afternoon. When he did so he found her in the little parlour of the cottage, calm and smooth and neat, sitting by the geraniums in the window, busy with her needle-work, as he had been accustomed to see her.

It was one of the more picturesque cottages in the lower part of the village, and had a good garden, with some old fruit trees in it, one of which overhung the thatched roof. It was just such a cottage as Tony had pictured himself living in with Nanny just after his father's death. But its attractive exterior was the best thing about it. It was too old to be put into effective repair without a larger expenditure than a somewhat penurious landlord was likely to undertake, and no patchings and tinkerings could make it a satisfactory habitation for the family that occupied it.

There were the father and mother and four children, now growing up. Whatever corner had been found for the old woman who had come to it as a haven for her latter years must have been of a very different character

from the room she had occupied for so long at Ifield Lodge. Life in this fair-seeming decaying dwelling must have been lived under constant inconvenience and deprivation. But the woman of the house was always clean and neat, and her children well-dressed in country fashion. Tea was preparing in the kitchen as Tony went through it, and the scene was homely and inviting. And here was old Nanny, sitting in the little parlour, crowded with cherished possessions, like the lady she was in all but recognized station, and pleased to have come back to the state of life from which she had derived. The daily difficulties and deprivations of life were accepted as a matter of course by the country folk of this class. They would grumble at this and that, but none of it was a burden upon their spirits.

CHAPTER XI

THE WHERRY

THE *Norfolk Beauty* was made ready for her cruise. Tony worked almost as hard at it as if he were one of Bob Cutting's paid hands, and revelled in the sense of doing a man's work as well as in the way in which Bob took his help, never thanking him for it in words but showing that he valued it, and for more than it was worth in extra labour. Holiday traffic had greatly increased from the year before. Boats were always putting in at Merstead, and Bob was continually being taken from his work to attend to their requirements. Young Bob, who with another man was going in charge of the wherry, was not remarkable for sustained effort in the shore-going branch of his calling, though he would fulfil his duties well on the water. Tony worked more steadily and responsibly than he did. The last touches were put hardly an hour before the party was due to take over the wherry, and then Bob did tell Tony that he didn't know what he should have done without him.

"Sims to me you're cut out for a boat-builder, Master Tony," he said. "If ever you're in want of a job you come to me."

So there was another prospect held out to him, and at the moment it was not without allurements. He had on his oldest clothes, which were dirty and torn in places. His hands were dirty too, and rather sore. His body was stiff with the exercise of unwonted muscles, and he was tired, but his tiredness was no more than he had often

experienced in the cricket field, and he got rid of most of it, as well as the stiffness, and some of the dirt, by a swim in the Broad, where the trees came down to the water and enclosed a little retired bay, and by a profusely provided tea in Bob's cottage.

It was a glorious sensation to have earned those refreshments by work that he had thoroughly enjoyed—much better than to have earned them by play. Young Bob didn't seem to understand that. Tony had been inclined to sympathize with him in previous holidays, when he had shirked the work he was supposed to be doing and gone off with him to swim or sail or fish. Of course he would have a royal time from now onwards, sailing the wherry, living on the fat of the land, and indeed making his living by doing much the same things as the holiday makers whom he was to accompany did for their pleasure. But he ought to have taken that as his reward, and earned it by sticking hard to the less attractive work, which, however, if taken in the right spirit was a reward in itself. It occurred to Tony that the right sort of education, which he had had himself, was necessary to set yourself right on this point. It was the gentleman who took a pleasure in work for its own sake, because he had been taught, in games, to put his back into it. Even Bob Cutting, though he worked hard, was not obviously moved to satisfaction by a job completed in the same way as Tony himself was. He was inclined to grumble, as he sat at tea in his comfortable cottage, at the continuous work that was before him during the next two months, though satisfaction peeped through his grumblings at the extra money he would be earning. Yet he couldn't have done anything in life that would have suited him better than what he was doing. Making the allowances which Tony in his new-found enthusiasm was hardly

capable of making for the deadening effect of use and wont, and for the hard cold times of the year when his work would be very different from what it was in these summer months, he was yet to be considered a fortunate man, with no desires that he could not gratify to compare with those whose fulfilment was his everyday experience.

The brick-floored kitchen of Bob's cottage was a room to gladden the eyes. The cottage itself, as well as the yard and sheds and staith, was the property of the Squire, as was every building and every yard of land in Merstead, but Bob's forbears had lived and worked there for generations past. Everything that the cottage and the sheds contained was his. The oak tables, the dresser with its array of willow-pattern plates, the corner cupboard which contained the more delicate china, for display and seldom for use, the rush-bottomed chairs, the tall lacquer-cased clock—they were all just right for such an interior, but to Bob and his missus no more than the rather old-fashioned household gear which served their turn. A few years later, and either they or young Bob would probably succumb to the temptations that would be held out to them to sell some of their possessions. They had already had offers for this and that, but this was the time when buyers expected to get bargains from cottagers, through the ignorance of their victims, and the offers had aroused no more than a faint surprise that they should have been made at all.

The door was open to the narrow strip of garden in front of the cottage, and framed a picture of the *Norfolk Beauty* lying at the staith and the waters of the Broad with the low woods on the other side. Bob could never have his tea in peace now, he complained; he had to keep an eye on the yard all the time. Otherwise the

door might have been shut, as the long latticed window was, with the row of bright red pots in front of it, holding a fine show of geraniums and fuchsias, in the cultivation of which Mrs. Cutting took as much pride as in the beeswaxing of her furniture and the polishing of her brasses.

Mrs. Cutting was a clean smiling woman, with the comfortable air that is acquired by village matrons whose tendency is to put on flesh, and who are able to indulge in a modest degree of good living. Bob was lucky in her. She made good use of the money he gave her for housekeeping, and allowed him a freedom in the matter of evenings with his cronies at the "Wheatsheaf" which some wives would have nagged at. She did him credit too, with her pleasant round face and her neatly kept person. Her children were well-mannered and well-dressed too. There were three girls and a boy younger than Tabitha, and an elder daughter, Alice, who was in service, but was spending her fortnight's holiday at home.

Alice had her father's Saxon colouring and her mother's quick sparkling eyes. She was a pretty girl, and, relieved of the necessity of subduing her spirits to the key proper to respectful dependence, she talked and laughed gaily and freely. She was about a year older than Tony, and he had known her as a child, though not so well as he had afterwards known Tabitha and other village children a few years younger. She had been away from home during his recent visits to Merstead, and now she seemed quite different, much more grown up than he felt himself to be, and hardly to belong to Bob Cutting's family. Her mother had probably been just the same during her years of good service, before her marriage. She had kept more of the refinement learnt in those years than most cottage wives, but Alice was in the very thick of it, and

her mother seemed homely beside her. It was difficult to imagine her subsiding into her probable future lot of hard-worked wife and mother, whose interest in her personal appearance would begin to depart from her immediately after her marriage, and, unless she was different from most, would disappear altogether upon the birth of her first child. She was prettily dressed, but not in the cheap finery sometimes resorted to by her class when they laid aside the more becoming costume of their service. She was her mother's daughter in her love of neatness, and her father was proud of her, and gave her occasional presents to supplement her wages.

Tony was slightly exhilarated by the way in which she addressed herself to him, with some deference but no awkward reticence. It would have been tiresome to have all the young people sitting round the table silent and watchful while he talked to Bob. She made the meal merry. She was delighted to be at home, and apparently delighted to have Tony there. She did not exactly make eyes at him, but she was quite aware how pretty she was and seemed to be encouraging him to notice it. He felt none of the awkwardness with her that had come over him in the morning when he had met Tabitha. He could not carry on quite the same intercourse with a servant in his grandfather's house as when she had been a child in her own home. Alice was a servant too, but she didn't seem like one. She was just Bob's daughter and young Bob's sister, but refined to a surprising degree for such relationships. Indeed, but for her hands, and her speech, which, however, was far less rustic than that of her family, she might have been taking tea in a cottage in the same way as he was.

But there were limits to the independence she allowed herself. Bob lit his pipe after tea, saying he would sit

there for a few minutes. But he had no sooner done so than one of the children came running in to say that a wagonette was coming down the lane with a lot of gentlemen in it. Bob went out, and Tony followed him, expecting Alice to come too. She came to the door but no farther, and he said good-bye to her and her mother and went on to watch the embarkation.

There were five young men in the wagonette, and another in a cart that followed it with their gear. Tony exclaimed with pleasure, for among them were Fred and Morton Hopwood, neither of whom he had seen since his father's death. They were as pleased to see him, and after explanations given and received he was introduced to the rest of the party, who treated him with hearty friendliness. He accompanied them on board the wherry, and showed a proprietary air in pointing out all its conveniences, leaving Bob and young Bob and the other man who was to sail with them to bring the luggage. They had not been on board for five minutes before he was invited to make one of the party for the cruise. "There's lots of room for an extra one," said Morton. "Nip off home and get some clothes, Tony, and you can sleep on board to-night. We're going to make an early start to-morrow."

Here was a blissful prospect! Tony had always longed to go for a cruise on a wherry or a yacht, but a whole fortnight of it, and in such company, was beyond anything he had imagined for himself. He liked the society of young men, with whom he had always got on swimmingly; and these young men were of the kind he liked best—all of them school or Cambridge friends of the Hopwoods, who would treat him as they did, with a mixture of chaff and affection, to which he would respond by making himself useful all round. He would have a

right royal time with them—something to talk about when he got back to school. H. B. Greeley was of the party, who had played cricket for the Gentlemen of England, and no doubt there were others among them whose friendship would earn him kudos.

He ran off eagerly, but when he got to the end of the lane he slowed down, and finished up with a slow reflective walk. Would his aunt like him to go off for a fortnight, only a few days after he had come to Merstead? Of course she would let him go, but the more he thought of it the less he liked the idea of asking her. And before he reached the Rectory gate he had discovered that he did not particularly want to go himself—at least just yet, and for so long. He was not yet healed of his loss, and wanted the comfort of this quiet home, and the love that was his in it.

Miss Barrett was in the garden. There was a little encampment of wicker chairs in a shady corner of the lawn. She was busy with her needlework, and the old Rector was reading in a chair by her side, but laid down his book and went into the house just as Tony came in at the gate. Oh, no, he didn't want to break away from this satisfying tranquillity. It touched him strangely, just to see his aunt sitting there in the green sun-flecked shade, with her spectacles on her nose, and his grandfather's book laid face downwards on the little table by the side of his chair.

His aunt smiled at him as he crossed the lawn. He stood by her and put his arm round her comfortable shoulder. "It's the Hopwoods' party who are sailing in the *Norfolk Beauty*," he said. "They've just come, and they wanted me to go with them. But I don't think I want to. I'd rather stay with you."

She must have understood it all in a moment, as she

looked up at him. She loved him, and the love was made plain, though she said nothing for a moment. A sudden sob escaped Tony, which completely surprised him, and was followed by a burst of tears, the last that were to be drawn from him by the realization of his loss.

He went back to the wherry presently, and stayed to supper—one of those jolly holiday meals of tinned provisions and fresh country fare, which taste better than the most elaborate of cooked dinners, with the doors of the cabin wide open and the peace and freedom of nature all around. Tony's hosts were merry and happy, with their holiday all in front of them, and zest for it at its strongest. Tony was as gay as any of them, for they made much of him, but exercised no pressure on him to sail with them. The Hopwoods must have told them of his father's recent death. Fred Hopwood had understood his rather lame explanations at once, and given him a friendly squeeze of the shoulder. "You're better at home for the present, old boy," he said. "But you might perhaps join us for the last few days." Tony's spirit lightened: his aunt would be glad for him to do that, and he would be ready for it and enjoy it.

The wherry sailed at seven o'clock the next morning, and Tony was down at the staith to wave them off. There was a morning breeze, enough to fill the great black sail, and send the heavy craft through the water, with that pleasant music of ripples slapping against her side. Bob watched her for a few minutes, but had so much on his hands that his pride of ownership couldn't keep him there long. Tony watched her until she passed from under the trees on the other side of the Broad, heeled over ever so little, and then tacked to make the opening of the river, down which she went sliding with her narrowed sail showing high above the reedy banks. He felt

a little envious of the white-flannelled figures who had waved him a last good-bye before being hidden by the river bank, but he was so happy in the fresh sparkling morning, with his conscience approving him, and with the sense of his immediate surroundings, the life in them not yet subdued to unemotional acceptance, that he whistled as he turned away. He could hardly have been happier if he had been on board the wherry.

It was Sunday morning, and breakfast at the Rectory was not until nine o'clock. He had a good hour on his hands before he need go back and dress himself in his Sunday clothes. Some of it was taken up by a bathe, but that wasn't so much fun alone as when young Bob was there to lark with. After all, he was inclined to envy young Bob, as he lay on the grassy bank letting the sun dry him, and feeling a little lonely. The young men had taken to him, and young Bob had grinned at Tony as he told him in an aside that they was the sort of ones he liked, and they wouldn't lose nothing by the way they was treating him.

They were good sort of people, the Cuttings. Young Bob was inclined to be lazy in his work, and independent in his attitude towards his betters. He had given Tony to understand that he liked the idea of cruising, but wasn't going to let anybody treat him as a servant; which meant that he would have shown himself stubborn and unhelpful if the party with whom he was sailing had offended his susceptibilities. Tony had told the Hopwoods in his hearing that they were lucky to have him on board with them, and they had made a bit of fuss with him, as one of Tony's friends. He would do anything for them now, because he liked them.

Young Bob was a lucky fellow. The vision came to Tony, as he lay upon the warm bank, of a life free from

all striving and trouble; lived in a beautiful place, with enough variety to salt it, and with no distractions of ambition and consequent discontent. Young Bob was better off than he was, really. He had everything that he could want already, in a position above which he would never desire to rise. And he had left school and its constraint to the will of others. He had actually more money to spend than Tony had. People in the position of the Cuttings, working with their hands, and a little with their brains, well above the line of poverty, need envy nobody.

Tony put on his clothes and strolled towards the reed-thatched cottage overlooking the staith. The family had already finished their breakfast. The younger children in their Sunday clothes were playing circumspectly in the yard, and Bob, in a clean shirt, but with no collar attached to it, and no coat to conceal its bleached purity, was smoking his pipe on a bench by the porch. With the wherry and the other boats that had lain at the quay gone, he had really nothing that he need do for a few hours, but seemed to think it beneath his dignity to be caught taking his ease in this fashion, for after a few words with Tony he went off to the sheds. "No time for nawth'n these days," he said, "and as for charch o' Sundays, might as well expect to go to the theaytre o' week-days."

Tony laughed at him. Villagers went to church in those days, with the gentry setting the example, though the times in which they might have got into trouble for staying away were over. "I'll tell grandfather you're too busy," he said; to which Bob deigned no reply.

Just as Tony was about to leave the yard Alice came to the door and bade him good morning. She would go to church by and by, leaving her mother to prepare the

Sunday dinner. She was already neatly dressed, and has just discarded the apron in which she had been helping clear away and wash up. Few of the other girls of the village would have made that appearance at eight o'clock of a Sunday morning, though they might be smart enough a few hours later. It preserved for her the air of being rather above her station. Tony in his very unkempt state felt a little abashed before her.

"I saw them go off," she said. "The wherry looked fine, didn't she? Why wasn't you with them, Master Tony?"

A faint impulse came to him to say that he hadn't wanted to leave her. It was the sort of thing he had been accustomed to say to girls at Hilbury. But with the impulse came a slight sense of shock that he should have thought of treating Bob's daughter in that way. "I'm going to join them for the last few days," he said, a little stiffly. "I didn't want to go away from home so soon after I had come."

She came along the few yards of garden path, and made as if to stroll with him a little on his way. He moved on, feeling rather uncomfortable, because of her unconstrained friendliness, which he thought she would not have shown him if she could have known that it had crossed his mind to flirt with her.

"Well, I'm glad you didn't go," she said. "It's rather dull here, 'specially with Bob gone. But I suppose you won't be coming to the yard so much, now the wherry isn't here."

"Oh, there'll be lots to do," he said. "There's nothing I like better than playing about with boats. I'll take you and the kiddies for a sail to-morrow if you like."

His diffidence had left him. He didn't really want anything but to be on friendly terms with the whole Cut-

ting family, Alice included. But she said: "Children make such a bother in a boat," and in such a tone that he knew she was inviting him to take her for a sail alone.

He stole a look at her. She was a very pretty girl, prettier even than he had thought. She met his look, not with challenge, which would have put him on his guard against her, but shyly, with something of the child in her appeal, as if she were asking him, as a superior being, to be kind to her. They were two young people, and neither of them had anybody else of their own age to play with.

"All right," said Tony, "I'll take you alone. Get your father to let us have the new dinghy. I've only been out in her once, and then there was hardly any wind."

That put everything all right. It pleased him, as he walked home, to think that he and she could enjoy themselves together, with no concealment about it, and no concealment necessary. He would rather have had young Bob to play with, naturally, but— He took warning from a certain warmth of feeling in his midriff, which he had experienced before in his somewhat precocious love-makings, and asked himself a question. When he had done so, a revulsion of feeling came over him. It was not a question of Alice being Alice, Bob Cutting's daughter; he would have felt just the same about a girl at Hilbury. With his heavy loss so recent, and his mind set upon complete openness and innocence of life, it seemed to him a shocking thing that he should be thinking about a girl at all.

That settled it for the time being. He would take Alice out in the new dinghy, if Bob would lend it to him; but he wouldn't let himself think about it with particular pleasure, and if the temptation, of which he had freed

himself for the moment, came to him to say anything to her that he wouldn't say before her whole family he would resist it.

He ran the rest of the way home, and went up to his bare sunny room to make himself ready for Sunday.

CHAPTER XII

SIR JAMES

IN after years Tony came to look back upon those Sunday mornings in Merstead Church as representing something that had passed away with his boyhood, an old-fashioned half-romantic way of religious service that was no longer to be found anywhere in England, though it had seemed the natural country way of his boyhood.

The church was always full, for one thing, and there was a smell compounded of all sorts of ingredients which betokened village humanity in its best clothes, and for a hot summer morning perhaps too many of them. One might find a crowded church here and there in later days, but it would never be quite the same kind of crowd, of people who came together regularly, sat in the same seats and contributed a character to the service other than what was intrinsic in it.

The old Rector considered himself somewhat advanced as a churchman. He had discarded the black gown in the pulpit, but he still wore a flowing surplice with no cassock beneath it. He sometimes omitted the Litany, but never the ante-Communion service. He had shortened his sermons, but never preached for less than five and twenty minutes. The length of the service was still a trial to fidgeting youth, lasting for nearly two hours.

The church was ancient but of no particular antiquarian or architectural interest. It had been kept in repair, but no more. There was nothing in it, except the decorated roof timbers, to show what it had been in

pre-Reformation days. But its atmosphere was of a time not much later. The Communion Table of Jacobean oak was covered with a worn fringed cloth of crimson velvet, and had a large cushion at either end, with a book upon one of them. The pulpit was of the same date, with a reading desk beneath it. Some heavy oak benches in the choir accommodated the school children, who were forced to a more passive demeanour than was altogether congenial to their tastes by the prominent position in which they found themselves.

Behind them was the Squire's pew, or what remained of it, for part had been partitioned off as a vestry. Two rows of seats remained, and in the foremost sat Sir James March, alone in his territorial dignity.

Tony had his eye very much upon him, as the service droned its way through the hot sleepy hours devoted to it. The Rectory pew, in which he sat alone—his aunt played the little organ, for want of somebody who could do it better—was in the forefront of the nave, and there was nobody else except the school children for him to look at. Sir James represented something of the thronging life of the world in which he took such eager interest.

There was nothing about him that, if he had been unknown and in no seat of honour, would have drawn more than a glance. He was an old man, with a clean-shaven unexpressive face, neither tall nor short, inconspicuous in clothing, not marked by signs of race, or by any intellectual capacity. He went through the service conscientiously, and during the sermon sat with his head bent, showing no sign of interest in its worn propositions, but no impatience at the length at which they were stated.

The life he lived, and had lived for some years, was of no more outstanding quality than was shown by this regular participation in the dutiful worship of his ten-

antry. He lived in a fine house, but he lived in it alone, and had gradually withdrawn himself, as age crept on, from intercourse with neighbours of his own standing. There were no close relations left to him, and it was years since any visitors had stayed at the Hall. He was said to be getting niggardly in his old age, though reputed a rich man. Hardly any horses were left in his stables, and the house servants had been reduced in number. He had kept up his shooting until ten years before, and Tony could just remember the parties that he had had for it, which had been the last of any entertaining that had been done at Merstead Hall. Then he had let the Hall and the shooting, and spent the autumn and winter at his house in London. Four years before he had sold his London house, and had not left Merstead since. The shooting had been taken over by Lord Gunton, whose property adjoined his.

He had always looked after his property himself, with the help of a bailiff, and this was his chief occupation now. He was a close-fisted landlord and not popular with his tenants. But they were used to him and his ways, and the older of them remembered when he had gone about among them with a more open hand. They accepted him as part of the established order of things, and there were ways of getting round him, if not by direct approach, through Field, the bailiff, in some emergencies, or through Miss Barrett in others.

It may be imagined that the way of life of an old man of nearly eighty, who had gradually reduced his activities until the passing of years meant little more to him than the passing of days or hours, was not what exercised Tony's mind as he sat on his hard seat and contemplated the inscrutable face of Sir James March, while the utterance of his grandfather's blameless thoughts passed un-

heeded through his ears. In himself he represented nothing but old age, restricted in desire and soon to close. It was what he represented in possession and opportunity that interested Tony. He held in his frail ungrasping hands what would mean endless satisfaction to one who had the power to enjoy it. Perhaps he had enjoyed it all himself in the long past days of his youth; but of what use was it to him now, and what disposition would he make of it when the time came for him to give it all up?

Nobody knew. But with the near prospect of a race that had held house and lands for generations coming to an end it was natural that there should be speculation. Tony had taken little interest in it. When he came to ask himself what he had actually heard, he could remember nothing definite, except that there was nobody to succeed Sir James in the baronetcy. His impression was that he was not entirely without relations, and that he could leave his property to whomsoever he pleased.

Leave his property! Merstead Hall, and all that went with it, and money besides—plenty of money, which he wasn't spending. Some lucky person, it was possible with no idea at present of the good fortune in store for him, would come in for it all, and the whole of his life would be altered by it.

Sometimes, in novels, a young man, even a boy, with nothing apparently before him but a life of hard work and little pleasure, was lifted into a state of affluence, and consequent happiness, by the whim of an old man who had taken a fancy to him. Sometimes there had been only one meeting, in which the young man, or the boy, had rendered the old man some little service, out of the natural kindness of his cheerful heart, and had gained his rich reward from it, though entirely devoid of any such expectation.

Tony's errant fancy, always ready to soar at a touch of imagination, and not yet weighted by experience, or much principle, took huge flights, while the service droned its way to the end, and the captives to their sense of duty supported it in drowsy silence or made exercise of their lungs at such times as they were called upon to do so.

Miss Barrett stayed behind to practise her little choir. Tony had sometimes stayed with her, especially at the beginning of the holidays, for the sake of the humour and interest to be got out of watching the school children in their musical endeavours. But this morning he went out with the rest of the congregation, though behind them, and did not push on for a word with some of those from a distance whom he had not yet met. Sir James March came out immediately after him, and Tony took off his straw hat, with a smile, and said: "Good morning, Sir James. I hope you're quite well."

The old man looked at him with unsmiling eyes, and grunted, "Morning, boy."

"I'll walk with you to the lodge gates if I may," said Tony. "Auntie won't be out just yet, and I've nothing to do."

The frank address seemed to please the old man, for he nearly smiled as he said, "Come along then. But I don't walk very fast, you know."

They set out, down the churchyard path and under the lych gate, and passed through a group of lingering villagers, who touched their hats or curtsied according to sex in a way that made Tony feel proud of his companionship. He was quite ready to talk brightly, and make himself interesting to an old man who lived a lonely life but would be pleased to have attracted engaging youth to him; but thought he would wait until he was out of

earshot of friends and acquaintances. Alice Cutting, with a brother and sister too young to engage in public psalmody, was lingering on the outside of the group, but went off before them on the same road when she saw whom Tony was with. She was slim and smart in her neat Sunday best, but Tony had no eyes for her at the moment.

Sir James had, though. "That Cutting's girl?" he asked, and mumbled some praise of her looks, and surprise that she should have grown up so fast.

This gave Tony a lead, and he talked about Bob Cutting and the *Norfolk Beauty*, and his coming cruise in her.

Sir James did not take it up. There was something he had to say first. He walked slowly, but held himself upright and did not use his stick for support. There was a slight frown on his face as he said: "Sorry to hear of your father's death. Sudden, wasn't it?"

Tony's heart contracted. His thoughts had been far away from his dear father. "Yes," he said, looking down.

"Never saw much of him," said Sir James, "not of late years. Went to his wedding, though. Second marriage, wasn't it? Got a half-brother, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Tony again. His thoughts had been far away from Henry too, and he didn't want to be reminded of him.

"Rector told me you'd a half brother who'd look after you. Well, people have got to die some time, I suppose, but you wouldn't expect to lose your father at your age. Glad there's somebody to look after you. How old was your father?"

"Sixty-two," replied Tony, wishing he would leave the

subject, and half wishing he had not offered to walk with him.

"Sixty-two. That's an age many men die at. If you get over that you're likely to live any time. Your grandfather don't seem to me to be getting any younger. I'm older than he is by two or three years, but the chances are I shall see him buried."

"You knew my mother, sir, didn't you?" asked Tony, determined to create a diversion.

"Knew your mother? Of course I knew your mother. Monstrous pretty girl she was too. I can see her now skating on the ice when she was a little girl, and her sister clucking about after her, like an old hen. The plain one and the pretty one, we used to call 'em. And the pretty one died, and the plain one's alive now. Well, you never know how things will turn out. I won't take you any farther, young man. Thank you for giving me your company. Don't see much company nowadays, but there's plenty to do. Kept busy all the time looking after things, and seeing that one or another doesn't get the better of me. Good-bye!"

He passed through the gates of his park, and Tony made his way back to the Rectory, rather crestfallen, and inclined to be dissatisfied with himself.

He had not, however, lost his interest in Sir James, and brought up his name over the dinner table. "I walked as far as the gates with Sir James after church," he said to his aunt. "He told me he remembered you and mother skating, when she was a little girl."

Miss Barrett looked surprised, and Tony realized that the mere mention of Sir James March was a rare thing in his grandfather's house. Everybody in the village was talked about, men, women and children, except the

chief person in it. His name was not shirked; it came up sometimes quite naturally, but always in relation to somebody else. His own doings were never discussed, and Tony was quite used to this, although he had never thought about it, and had hitherto been little interested in Sir James in consequence.

His grandfather looked up. "Walked with Sir James, did you?" he said. "What brought that about?"

"Oh, well, he came out of church just after me, and there was nothing to do, so I said I'd walk to the gate with him."

His aunt laughed. "He didn't ask you into the house, I suppose," she said; and the Rector said: "I haven't been inside the Hall for over twenty years."

Tony felt relieved. It was not, then, forbidden, to talk about Sir James, though neither of them ever did it. "Why haven't you been inside the Hall, grandfather?" he asked.

"Because I haven't been invited, Tony. Sir James and I were young men together. We were at Cambridge at the same time, though not at the same college, and he was a third year man when I was a freshman; so I didn't see much of him. His father presented me to this living, and I used to shoot with them and all that, and there's never been any difficulty between us—at least no dispute of any kind. It's just that there's nothing in common between us—nothing of any kind—and as the years went on we met less and less, until now I really don't know what I could find to say to him if I did go to his house. Perhaps it's odd that two men should live near each other for forty years, and be almost strangers, but it seems to have come about quite naturally."

It did seem odd to Tony, now that the fact was brought to his notice, but there seemed to be no mystery in it.

He looked at his aunt and said: "You go to the Hall sometimes, Aunt Bertha. What is he really like?"

"Well, you ought to know better than I, Tony," she said, with her usual good humour, "as you must have had a conversation with him on general topics, which I never have. What did you talk about?"

"He said he was sorry to hear of father's death. We didn't talk for long. It's such a short way."

"And he didn't ask you to go to see him. There are some things worth seeing at the Hall. There's a picture by a famous artist, whose name I have forgotten. Perhaps it is Botticelli. It is somebody of that sort. Quite a famous picture, I have been told, and some family portraits by other great artists."

"Oh, yes, and there are some fine books," the old Rector took her up. "There's a fine library at the Hall. I know the look of it very well, but in the days when I used to go there I didn't take the interest in books that I do now. Reading, yes. I was always a reader. But books as books, no. Really, now you have put it into my head, I think I should like to see the library again, and look over the books. Sir James might be rather surprised at my going there, but there's no reason at all why I shouldn't. I've just got out of the way of going, that's all."

"I wish you'd go, and take me, grandfather," said Tony. "I should like to see the books and the pictures."

"Very well, Tony, I will," said the old man. "We'll go this afternoon, after church. Perhaps Sir James will offer us a cup of tea. I suppose you wouldn't like to come, my dear?"

"No, thank you," said Miss Barrett. "And I'll have tea ready for you here when you come back."

Tony's attendance at afternoon church was not required as a matter of regular duty. Sir James had given up attendance some years before, and his tenantry had largely followed his example. The almost universal change from afternoon to evening service had not come about at Merstead, partly because there were not enough lamps in the church, and on a fine Sunday afternoon attendance was of the scantiest.

Tony told his aunt that he would go and see old Nanny, and come back for his grandfather after church, and she made no objection. But he met Nanny on her way to the service, in all her sober gentility, and had all he could do to persuade her to "cut" it.

"Come and sit in the garden with me, dearie," he said coaxingly. "We shall have it all to ourselves, and it will be like old times. I haven't had a real proper talk with you since we came here, and I've stayed away from church on purpose."

She couldn't resist that, and they ensconced themselves in the chairs on the lawn, Nanny sitting upright on the edge of hers to show that she knew her place.

"Didn't you tell me once," said Tony, very soon after the opening of the conversation, "that Sir James wanted Mr. Jacob to marry mother?"

"Oh, I never put it so strong as that," said the old lady, looking rather shocked. She had intimated as much many times, but probably the atmosphere of Merstead, to which she had returned, was less encouraging to such imaginings than that of Ifield Lodge.

"Sir James told me this morning how pretty mother was when she was young," said Tony, slightly disappointed.

"Did you talk to Sir James, dearie?" she asked, with the same sort of surprise as had been expressed by his

aunt, which was not altogether gratifying to him. "Ah, Sir James used to be very different when he was younger. I remember him as a handsome young man, with a joke for everybody, if he wasn't upset with them like. And you've talked to him? What did you talk about?"

"Well, I told you. You did say once that he would have liked Mr. Jacob to marry mother, but I don't remember why you said it—what you had to go on."

"You see, dearie, though Sir James and his lady and the Rector and your grandmother, and the young ladies and young Mr. Jacob, was good friends enough in a way of speaking, there wasn't—there wasn't the same way of living at the Hall and the Rectory."

She spoke apologetically, but Tony understood that although she loved him better than anybody else, as she had loved his mother before him, she was giving him to understand that she did not put the Rectory family on a level with that of the Hall. Certainly that was a new note, and from Nanny, who had treated him as a young prince, it came to him with a disagreeable shock. Could it be that she of all people was affected by the change in his circumstances, and judged him lower than before because he was no longer the only child of a rich home? He put the thought from him, but said rather resentfully:

"I thought you loved mother so much that you wouldn't have thought anybody was above her."

"Oh, so I did, dearie," she said, shocked in her turn. "There wasn't a more beautiful young lady in all the grand places around, and if my young ladies had been able to go here and there like others, there'd ha' been nobody more admired or courted. But there was no carriage kept, and it wasn't much company she saw, except a little now and then at the Hall, and I was only

trying to tell you that that wasn't as much as it might have been."

"Then didn't Mr. Jacob admire her?"

"Oh, yes, he did. Before she was grown up, when he was a young gentleman in the army, he made quite a fuss of her. And when she was grown up, there was one Christmas, when there was skating on the Broad, when they *was* a lot together, and it was then I thought there might be something coming of it. But he went to India soon afterwards, and soon after that he was killed, poor young gentleman; so it was never to be."

"Did Sir James know about it that Christmas? That must have been the time he talked to me about."

"I don't know whether he knew or not, dearie. But perhaps there wasn't much to know about. People came from far and near to skate on the Broad, and the young gentlemen and the young ladies they'd skate together, whoever they might be, and it was only them as might be watching for it who'd see anything. I remember that the gentry all round had gay goings on that Christmas, and afterwards. There was more balls and such-like than was usual. But my young ladies didn't go to any of them except one they had at the Hall, and they came away early from that because the Rector he didn't approve of late hours, and it wasn't what they was accustomed to."

With every word she said she seemed to stamp them as not belonging to the world of great houses that lay about them, except as modest parsonage folk who might be asked to those within their narrow radius on a semi-public occasion. And after all, there had never been anything in the attitude of his grandfather and aunt which showed that they looked upon themselves as anything else.

Tony was uncomfortable in the idea, now for the first time so plainly put before him, that the genteel poverty which was the note of his grandfather's house had lain about his mother's girlhood, and uncomfortable also because he knew that he minded. Quick to rid himself of thoughts which affected his integrity, he said: "I'm sure they were happy at home together," and Nanny responded to this, and made him feel better as she talked about his mother's gentle gaiety, and brought her before him as no more desirous of going outside the allotted sphere of her home than his aunt was now.

"I think," he said boldly, "that I'd rather have been brought up at the Rectory than at the Hall."

But this was only what he wanted to think. He walked with his grandfather to the Hall a little later, with the due sense of the importance of a house larger and finer than he had ever been inside of, as it reflected upon himself who was going to it, and with a determination still strong to make a friend of Sir James March, as he had always been able to make friends with older people when it had seemed worth his while to do so. It was odd that just as they stood under the Jacobean porch, waiting for the clanging of the bell inside to cease and to bring them entrance, by one of those curious freaks of memory which call up images unrelated to any exercise of the mind, that of Mr. Broadbent should have presented itself to Tony. Old Broadbeans! It would have been much to Tony's advantage if he could have made a conquest of *him*, but he had remained singularly unresponsive to such blandishments as he had practised on him on first being removed to his Form, and had very nearly fixed a nickname on him because of them. "Will the engaging Dare kindly charm us?"—with something or other.

There had been a tendency to take this up. Although

old Broadbeans had used the epithet once and once only, it was even now not forgotten, if he behaved in such a way as to give a reminder of it. But it didn't adapt itself readily to shortening, the boys who had got their remove with him were much occupied in flexing their own behaviour to the new requirements, and it died down. Tony was obsessed with the word itself during those few days in which its permanence hung in the balance, and hated himself for what had brought it upon him. The engaging Dare! If he had been saddled with that epithet for the rest of his school days, and remembered by it afterwards, life would have been permanently embittered for him. It fell on him like a shadow now, a year later, whenever it came to his mind; and it came to his mind as he stood waiting for entrance to Merstead Hall.

CHAPTER XIII

ALICE

THEY were shown into a room in which Sir James was sitting, in an easy-chair by the empty fireplace, apparently doing nothing. He showed neither pleasure nor displeasure at seeing them, but grunted when the Rector explained, not without his usual simple loquacity, the purpose of their visit. "Better tell Blaine to open the shutters if you want to go into the library," he said, and rang the bell to give the order. "Don't use many rooms in the house now," he said. "Find I'm more comfortable here than anywhere."

Tony was looking round the room with interest, not unmixed with surprise. They had gone through a baize door and down a stone passage to get to it. It looked more like an office than anything, with a large ordnance map filling one wall, a great writing-table littered with papers, and cupboards and presses to hold more. There were a few uninteresting portrait-engravings, and a large painting over the mantelpiece of a stiff-legged horse and a bow-legged groom in a stable. The room faced north, and the windows were too high in the wall for anything to be seen from them except sky and the tops of trees. There was not a sign of comfort in it except Sir James's easy-chair and another one on the other side of the fireplace. If he found this room more to his taste than any other in the house, either the house or his taste must have been deficient.

He did not ask them to sit down, and the Rector chattered on about nothing in particular until the butler returned to say that he had opened the library. Sir James at first seemed as if he were going to allow him to take them there, for he made a motion with his hand and stood where he was in front of the fireplace. But as they were going out of the room he followed them. "Don't think I've been inside the library for over a year," he said. "Not much time for reading now. But there are plenty of books there, and worth a lot of money."

Tony had a sensation of pleasure as the beautiful room exposed itself to him. It was of great length, with half a dozen mullioned windows overlooking a formal garden set with yews and many roses. In the middle of the opposite wall was a great open fireplace with carved stone about it, and above it a fine painting of a family group of the seventeenth century. This was the only picture in the room; the rest of the wall space was given up to books, in cases much decorated with carving and some gilding. The books in their close ranks had the sober richness of old bindings in mellow colours, but attracted him more as the lining of the room than as giving earnest of literary entertainment. It was the room itself in its furnishings that set his imagination stampeding.

What a room to live in and to write in! Much of the furniture was shrouded in sheets, but it stood where it belonged, and there was enough to create the impression of ease and convenience; and the beautiful cabinets and writing-tables with their heavy silver furnishings were uncovered. The room could have been made entirely habitable in half an hour. Why on earth didn't Sir James use it, instead of that dismal uninteresting room in which he had said he was as comfortable as anywhere?

Something about it seemed to strike him, as Tony ex-

claimed at it. "We used to live here mostly," he said. "Had lots of pleasant times in this room."

Ah, then that was it! He was a lonely old man, who didn't want to live in constant reminder of happy times past. Rather pathetic! Tony thought he saw a change in his stiff old face, and felt a quick sympathy with him. "It must have been a lovely room to live in," he said. "I suppose my mother used to know it like that."

The old man grunted and went over to where the Rector was engaged with the books, murmuring appreciations. "You ought to look at the Caxtons," he said. "I don't know what they're not worth. Seems a pity to have so much money locked up where it's no good to anybody."

He pointed out where the treasures were to be found, and the Rector turned one or two of them over with admiring reverence, but with little show of knowledge. Tony put on an expression of appreciative awe, and asked a question or two designed to show his intelligence. But it was wasted on Sir James. "I've been thinking of getting a fellow down to go over the books," he said. "I dare say there are lots of other things that would fetch money, if you knew what they were. Seems ridiculous to keep them here where nobody ever looks at them; and I don't know what they'd get out of them if they did."

"Oh, but you wouldn't want to break up a fine library," said the Rector. "I suppose these books have been here ever since they were published. To think of that now! A book brought straight from Caxton's press, the first ever set up in England, I believe, though I don't pretend to know much about these things. It's what is inside a book that interests me. Somebody must have loved books to get together this collection, and prepared this fine room for them. I suppose you don't know who it was, Sir James?"

His supposition was correct. Sir James didn't know who it was, and didn't seem to care. "My brother William was interested in that sort of thing," he said. "He began to collect material for a family history, but after my father died he didn't come here much. We didn't get on very well together."

"Ah!" said the Rector, taking a book out of the shelf.

Tony had turned his attention to the picture over the fireplace. Perhaps Sir James was more assailable on the subject of pictures than of books. "Is that by Sir Joshua Reynolds?" he asked.

The old man chuckled. "Sir Joshua Reynolds!" he echoed. "Why even I know better than that. It was long before his time. It's by Lely—Sir Peter Lely. It's one of his best, they say. They're always asking me to lend it, to Exhibitions and so on. But I always say no. Once you begin that, you never know where you're going to end. If you want to see Sir Joshuas, young man, there are some in the drawing-room. They want me to lend those too, and the Gainsboroughs, but they'll stay where they are as long as I'm alive."

Tony, somewhat chagrined at his mistake, said he should like to see the other pictures, but Sir James now seemed to be in a hurry to get rid of them. He fidgeted, and looked at his watch. "Some other time," he said. "I've got something to do now. Come up some time in the morning, young man, just before lunch—no, better come just after lunch. If I'm not about, you can ask Blaine to show you round. Well, I don't want to drive you away, Barrett. Take your time; but I'll say good-bye to you now."

He shook hands with both of them and left them. The old Rector did not appear at all disconcerted at this odd behaviour, though he smiled at Tony behind Sir James's

back. "We came to see the books," he said, "and we'll look at the books. This is a rare treat. Now I have come here once I shall come here again. I can enjoy myself more without Sir James than with him."

He pursued his investigations, chatting freely but only occasionally requiring Tony's attention to some discovery. Tony roamed from shelf to shelf on his own account, but soon abandoned the pretence of caring about the books, and surveyed the room at large, examining the various articles of use or beauty that were scattered about it, even lifting the coverings from some of the furniture, standing at the windows to take in the garden picture that could be seen from them, and turning again to the room as if he were seeing it in imagination as it had been under constant occupation, or as it might be again for the delight of somebody who could appreciate it. He had an eye for a room, as it might be occupied by himself, and he had never seen a room like this before, except in one or two show houses that he had visited; and those had been rooms no longer in daily use. It settled itself in his mind as the one room he would like to live in, and he became lost in glamorous reverie, quite content to stand by the window as long as his grandfather liked to stay there, while the sun shone in through the latticed panes from above the tall trees that surrounded the garden, and the rooks called one another to their evening parliament. The quietness of it! the rich peace, the stateliness! All wasted on the old man who owned it, and never cared even to visit it!

Although the Rector was not inclined to take umbrage at the treatment they had received, he showed, as they left the house and walked across the park, that he was quite aware that it was not what might have been considered due to them. "Your Aunt Bertha was right," he

said. "But the fact is we've become such strangers, Sir James and I, that I've got used to never thinking about him, and I never realized how far he had got away from the ordinary ways of people in his station of life. He has nobody to think about but himself now, and won't put himself out a hair's breadth for anybody. That's a sad state of things, Tony, when you get old. And he used to like having people about him when I knew him first. Now he doesn't seem to want anybody."

"Did his brother that he said was fond of books die?" asked Tony.

"William? Yes, poor fellow. Sir James didn't treat him well. I didn't want to talk about him when he mentioned him. He married—oh, a nice enough girl she was, but not quite of the class people like the Marches were accustomed to marry, and Sir James wouldn't ask them to the house. They went to America. I went to see them in London just before they sailed; I always liked William, and I liked his wife too. She was the daughter of a doctor, I believe. There was nothing against her at all. I told Sir James so when I came back, but it didn't make any difference. Both of them died a few years later, and their only child died too. Perhaps if they hadn't gone away they would have been living still, or their son would, and the family wouldn't have been coming to an end, as it will now. I've always blamed Sir James for his foolish pride in that matter, but it is so long ago now that I had almost forgotten about it."

"Do you think I could go to the Hall some time to see the pictures?"

"Oh, yes. Sir James said you could. We might go together. I should like to see the pictures again too. We'll go in the morning, when Sir James is out as a rule. Blaine will take us round. Blaine is a very sensible man.

I have always liked Blaine. I would rather talk to Blaine than to Sir James."

Tony went down to the Broad early next morning. Bob Cutting made no difficulty about lending him the new dinghy to take Alice for a sail, and thanked him for doing so.

"She don't get much fun at home," he said. "Still she's a good girl and likes coming home."

Alice was rather silent until they had the sail hoisted and were running across the Broad before a brisk westerly breeze. Then she said with a little pout: "You were much too grand to speak to us after church yesterday. I didn't know you was such friends with Sir James."

"I'm not," said Tony. "I'd much rather have talked to you. But I wanted to see the books and pictures at the Hall, so I made up to him."

"Sir James likes you," said Alice, after a short pause. "He doesn't generally take much notice of young people."

"Likes me!" echoed Tony. "How on earth do you know that?"

"He told me so."

Tony stared at her and she laughed. "He came to see father yesterday evening," she said. "He doesn't often honour us, but he wanted to hear about the *Norfolk Beauty*."

"And he talked to you! And said he liked me!"

"Yes, you told him about the wherry, didn't you? That's why he mentioned you, I suppose. He asked me what I thought of you."

Tony was too surprised at this revelation of Sir James's interest in him to ask her what her reply had been. "He didn't seem to take any interest in me at all yesterday," he said. "What did he say exactly about me?"

"Oh, he said he was thinking of adopting you, and came to ask father if he approved."

It was like a curtain lifted on his secret thoughts, for the fractional second before her face, mischievous, challenging and a little offended, warned him that she was not so interested in Sir James's opinion of him as he was himself. He was quick to change his note. "I suppose it was just for something to say," he said with a laugh; "but grandfather and I went to the Hall yesterday afternoon, and he seemed in such a hurry to get rid of us that I couldn't help being surprised at his mentioning me at all. How did *you* come to be talking to him?"

"Why shouldn't I talk to him? He told father that I had grown into a very pretty girl, and took after granny when she was a girl. He meant Mother's mother, and I never saw her. See how old he is! He remembers my granny when she wasn't any older than me."

She was half child half woman still. But there seemed to be a difference in her since two days before. No doubt she was flattered by the notice she had received from the great man, who was so much more than anybody else to all these people of the village, and thought more of herself in consequence of it, addressing Tony as an equal, which she had not done before.

But she could not have been seen to better advantage than in the boat in which she was so much at home, handling the sheet while Tony steered, the wind freshening her cheek and playing with her hair. She was as pretty as any of the girls who had taken Tony's errant fancy, and he felt again that warming of spirit to her which had rather shocked him two days before. This time it seemed nothing to be resisted; it made him feel happy and eager. The sun sparkled more brightly on the water because of it, the wind and the swaying, dipping motion

of the boat were more delightful. "I wonder how long it is since Sir James sailed a boat," he said. "It must be horrid to be old and not able to enjoy things any more."

Something in his tone caused her to smile at him, and he smiled back at her. Neither of them could have expressed in words what their smiles meant, which was that they had the treasure of their youth, and were happy in spending some of it together.

As Tony walked back to the Rectory to dinner, the thoughts that had come to him about Alice when he had left her to take this road returned to him, and he asked himself quite honestly whether he had anything to blame himself for. When they had disembarked he had felt no embarrassment in talking to Bob, who was waiting for them on the staith. Would he feel at all uncomfortable in telling his aunt of his morning's expedition? He thought not, but perhaps he had better put it to the test.

He did so. "I took Alice Cutting for a sail this morning," he said. "She's very good in a boat."

His aunt took the disclosure with equanimity, but little Tabitha, who was waiting at the table, looked rather pensive. Tony didn't notice it, but his aunt did. "You might take Tabitha for a sail some afternoon or evening," she said. "She has been doing her work so well that I'm going to give her an extra holiday."

That seemed to make everything right. Tony and Alice were together for some part of every day. Tabitha was with them one afternoon, and didn't seem to be in the way. Tony was pleased that this should be so, but on Friday morning, which was the day before Alice's holiday came to an end, he asked her, not without tenderness, to go for a walk with him in the afternoon, and he would not have wanted Tabitha there then.

She consented readily enough, with a quick look at him and a flush of the cheek. He knew very well that she would respond to any advances of his towards her now, and the knowledge had kept him from making any. So far there had been no word between them that the world might not have heard, though their looks would have revealed something. The emotion that had grown up in Tony's mind had nothing of excitement in it, but was the deeper and the sweeter for the restraint that he had put upon himself. It seemed to him that when Alice had gone away he would have something to pride himself upon in not making love to her. Yet he wouldn't take resolution not to do so during the walk to which he had invited her.

They went by the Broad along a path that sometimes crossed open fields and was sometimes in the shade of trees. They talked only as they had grown used to talking, but with a sense of being closer together than they had been, and sometimes Alice's voice shook a little as she said something quite ordinary. By and by they found themselves walking hand in hand, neither of them speaking. That could not have lasted long, but nothing of all the ferment in their minds had risen to the surface before they were rudely disturbed by an angry voice behind them.

They sprang apart, and turned round to see Sir James March coming through the trees towards them, his face red and his hands trembling. One of them held a stick which for a moment it seemed as if he would use to strike Tony. He was almost incoherent, but with his eyes blazing he poured insulting words upon him, taking no notice of Alice, who, after a pause of consternation, brushed past him and fairly ran away.

The ugly inexplicable little scene was over in a moment. Before Tony had recovered from his surprise, or could

find words with which to reply to him, he controlled himself and walked on, throwing over his shoulder: "Don't let me find you making mischief with the girls of the village again. I won't have it."

Tony was left alone, standing in the middle of the little wood. The path was not far from the Broad, and he went and stood on the bank, trying to realize and estimate what it was that had happened to him.

He was outraged by Sir James's angry wounding words, for there had been no evil in his mind. But he was ashamed of himself too, for he knew that he had been letting himself drift, and, if he had made no love to Alice from the beginning of their intercourse, the interruption had come just on the eve of his doing so. If Sir James had come upon them a few minutes later there might have been reason for his attack.

What made Tony so uncomfortable was that he had been caught. He was in for a row. It was as it had sometimes been at school, when a master had found out something going on, and made it unpleasant for those concerned. But masters were used to that. They came down on you, and when they had exacted penalties the air cleared and you went on as before. With Sir James as the discoverer and avenger it was very different. Tony could not but suppose that he had at least lost his goodwill for ever. That was serious enough, after the high-flown hopes he had been cherishing of making his way into his grateful affections. It was intensely disagreeable to have been addressed as he had been by an elder not in scholastic authority over him, and put him very much out of conceit with himself.

But that was not the worst either. If only Sir James had been concerned, he could have kept out of his way, or rather have avoided putting himself into it, as he had

done previously. But Sir James had shown such anger over his discovery that it seemed certain that he would make complaints. Tony would get into hot water with his grandfather and aunt, and his life would be spoilt with them for some time to come.

The more he thought of this the less he liked it. As a child he had sometimes been punished by his aunt for "naughtiness," and since then she had occasionally rebuked him for something he ought not to have done. But even that had not happened for a long time past, and he was treated now as if he were grown up, as a guest who could be trusted not to disturb the way of life of his hosts, but rather to add to its pleasures. It would be painful to have to go back to the position in which he could be censured for committing a fault, and a moral fault, which had never happened before.

Annoyance against Sir James rose in him. After all he had committed no fault. "I was walking by the Broad with Alice. She is going away to-morrow and I was sorry for her. I had taken her hand—that was all—and we were just walking along, without saying anything, when Sir James—" That was how he would defend himself. He wouldn't allow himself to be blamed for nothing at all.

Perhaps he had better tell his story first. He walked back slowly towards the village. He had to pass by the top of the lane that led down to the yard, and then it occurred to him that he might not only have his aunt to deal with, but Bob Cutting. Perhaps Sir James would make trouble there too.

He stiffened himself. He had done nothing—nothing at all. Bob might have heard every word that he had ever said to his daughter, and found nothing to blame him for. He had been walking with her hand in his. Bob

knew what friends they had become, and had shown that he was pleased that it was so. If Bob had come upon them walking like that, said Tony to himself, he would not even have let go her hand.

He decided to say nothing, but to await events. It had begun to rain before he reached home, and was raining heavily after tea; so he did not go out again, but read in his grandfather's study until supper time, and afterwards played *béziq*ue with his aunt.

The dining-room was the general sitting-room, the drawing-room being scarcely used. It was sparsely furnished, but there was an air of homeliness about it, even with an empty grate. The old Rector had his easy-chair, in which he sat reading, but not so deeply as to be unsociable. Tony and his aunt played at a corner of the big dining table covered with a red cloth. A large lamp hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room, and moths fluttered about it. The night was close, and one of the French windows was open into the garden, whence came the sound of the steady rain and the odours it drew from the soil and the vegetation.

Tony felt the tranquillity and security of the scene, as he played his cards, and talked and laughed in the manner that he was aware endeared him to his aunt and his grandfather. They liked to feel that he was happy with them, and it brightened their lives to have him there. All the time he was nerving himself for what might come, with a sense of relief that it could not now come before the next day. But his fears had lessened. He would stand up against it, indignantly rebutting any charge of wrong behaviour. It might be awkward to be asked why he had said nothing, why he had behaved throughout the evening as if nothing had happened; but he would have his answer ready for that. Sir James had no right

to speak to him as he had, but he was an old man, and the best thing was to forget it. If there had been anything that he was ashamed of he couldn't have done so.

He was alone in his bedroom soon after ten o'clock, leaning out of the window, and trying to find out where exactly it was that he stood with himself, since he had spent the last few hours in deciding how he was to stand with others. But he did not examine himself closely, for it seemed important that he should not be too dissatisfied with himself.

One curious effect of the surprise that had overtaken him was that all the tenderness which had been working up in him towards Alice had disappeared. She was going away the next day, and that seemed to be about the best thing that could happen. He saw her with opened eyes as Bob Cutting's daughter, with whom he had made friends, and in whose company he had amused himself, just as he might have done with young Bob, if he had been at home; but that he should have thought of her as a girl to be made love to seemed to him incredible now. Yet he had certainly done so.

This room of his was permeated with the thoughts he had been cherishing about her. He felt a slight disgust with himself on account of it, and knew that if he examined himself further the disgust would increase.

He undressed and got into bed. The last image that crossed his mind was Sir James with his angry face and his trembling hands vituperating him, and of Alice running away, rather ungracefully. He was disturbed and unhappy before sleep came to release him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF THE TROUBLE

IT was raining steadily when Tony awoke next morning, and continued raining until the afternoon. He spent most of the morning in his grandfather's study, working at a Greek play, and at Cicero's Letters to Atticus; for he had formed the virtuous resolution of preparing for next term, and this seemed a good opportunity to begin.

He found it hard enough to concentrate himself. It was his grandfather's morning for sermon writing, but that now only meant going over old sermons preached many years before, and left him at liberty to engage in conversation whenever he felt so inclined. And Tony's heart was heavy; he could not keep his mind off what had happened, and what might happen at any moment.

But by the end of the morning there had been no appearance of Sir James March, and now he began to hope that he would be content with the scolding he had given him, and make no further trouble.

The sun shone at dinner time, and afterwards Tony went out. He had decided that he must go to the Cuttings. He would rather have put it off until Alice had gone away, but it would look odd that he should not say good-bye to her, and if what had happened had already come out it would look as if he were keeping away because he was ashamed of himself.

The cottage was closed and Alice was not to be seen as he went down to the staith. Two yachts had come in, to lie there over the Sunday, and Bob was busy with

them. "Here, Master Tony," he sang out at once, "come and lend a hand. We've got more than we can get through."

Tony's spirits lightened. Bob could have been told nothing. He turned to with a will and gave him help as effective as young Bob could have given if he had been there.

But when a pause came and Bob lit his pipe, he looked at Tony askance and said: "What was you doing with Alice yesterday? She come in in a rare tousle and said Sir James had caught you both at it, and kicked up such a bobbery that she run away."

Tony had a disagreeable shock; but Bob couldn't have been seriously annoyed or he wouldn't have received him as he had. "Didn't she tell you what we were doing?" he asked, almost aggressively, and Bob's eyes dropped as he said: "I suppose you were doing a bit of sweet-earting. It's plain you was both took that way, but I knowed I could trust you not to go too fur with it, and I could trust her too, or I wouldn't have left you be together so much. If it was nothing but a few words and a kiss, I ain't going to make a fuss. But—"

"I've never kissed Alice," Tony interrupted him indignantly. "Surely she told you that!"

Bob's face expanded into a grin. "P'raps she didn't want to let on you hadn't," he said. "Well, what was it you done that set Sir James off like that?"

When Tony told him he became serious again. "Well, that's a masterpiece!" he said, scratching his head. "I never heard as Sir James was such a holy boy himself when he was young. There's a many in this parish as could tell tales of him if they was so minded. There was a lot of 'em going about when I was a boy, but they've died down. Seems to me that what was at the bottom of

it was that Sir James come across you like that and it took him sudden-like that his time for them sort of philanderings was over, and that upset him. He's an old man and wishes he was a young one again."

"He was pretty beastly over it," said Tony, his opinion of himself much restored. "No wonder Alice ran away! When is she going? I want to say good-bye to her."

"Oh, she's gone," said Bob. "She was afraid Sir James might be coming down to make a fuss, and she didn't want to be here when he did it. So she went off this morning. Well, I ain't altogether sorry. She's not for the likes of you, in any way that I should want of my girl, and if you didn't kiss her yesterday or the day before you might have done it to-morrow or the day after, and it couldn't lead to no good. If I was you, Master Tony, I should forget all about her. You're too young to be sweet'earting at your age. You won't never do no good if you're always thinking about the petticoats. I wouldn't say it to a young gentleman like you if this hadn't 'appened to give me a right to it, but you're one of them as'll get into trouble about women if you don't watch it. You put that in your pipe and smoke it; and now let's overhaul this gear. It's a masterpiece how they got it into the state they have."

Tony was not so pleased with himself at the end of his interview with Bob as he had been at the beginning. There were things that he thought only he knew about himself, but one of them seemed to be known to Bob, who had by no means had his eyes shut to the quality of his interest in Alice, as he had imagined. Bob had rebuked him after all, and his rebuke, though less hurtful than Sir James's, had been even more effective.

Tony observed Sir James closely in church the next morning, but with very different ideas from those which

had filled his mind on the previous Sunday. He was no longer a mild old man to be worked on by the wiles of engaging youth, but a stern-spoken person in high authority, hardly even to be propitiated. He seemed to have grown greatly in importance, and Tony saw him now in the light in which old Nanny had always seen him, as a magnate, far above his own sphere. He had not taken in the full significance of Bob Cutting's reference to Sir James's youth, which seemed merely to throw into relief the old age of dignity at which he had arrived. And Bob's explanation of his so freely expressed anger had passed him by altogether. An old man was an old man to Tony, with no points of contact, except on the surface, with a young one. Even his grandfather had to be humoured; Tony was not really interested in anything that passed between them, though he pretended to be. Sir James had broken through that layer of courtesy which made the intercourse between an old man and a boy possible. He was now a person to be avoided, and perhaps to be feared, though Tony was beginning to think that the danger of revelation was over.

He went out of church among the first, and straight through the Rectory gate, with no more than a word to old Nanny, who would have detained him until Sir James came upon them, which he didn't want at all. But he was delayed just long enough to see out of the corner of his eye Sir James coming down the churchyard path, rather faster than his wont, and as he let the gate fall to behind him he called to him, and when he pretended not to hear, called a second time, more loudly.

Now he was in for it. With his face burning he went back to meet him, only hoping that he would not say what it was that he had to say so that those who were lingering on the road would hear him.

They met at the Rectory gate. Sir James had a half smile on his unexpressive face. "You seem in a mighty hurry," he said. "You want to see my pictures. Ask your aunt and your grandfather to come up after church this afternoon, and take a cup of tea with me."

He turned his back and walked off. Now what did that mean? Was he going to get them up to the Hall, and then make his accusation against a defenceless guest? It hardly seemed possible, but why should he have given the invitation otherwise? Could it be that on consideration he had decided that he owed Tony some amends for his intemperate expression of anger? That hardly seemed possible either, but it was a more agreeable supposition than the other, and Tony took refuge in it, but wished that the afternoon was well over, and the whole affair with it, one way or the other. It was disturbing to be kept on tenterhooks in this way; but there was nothing to do but await events.

The three of them went to the Hall that afternoon. They were not shown into the dreary business room that Sir James chiefly used, but into the fine gallery above the library, which was full of beautiful pictures and beautiful furniture. Sir James received them there with a courtesy which, if it could not be described as stately, was at least more in accordance with what might have been expected from the owner of such a house than anything that Tony had hitherto seen in him. He did the honours of a beautifully laid tea-table himself, and the only sign he gave of the characteristics that were commonly laid to his charge was in an anxious reluctance to denude the sugar basin, which had only about a dozen lumps in it to begin with, and half that number at the end of the repast.

He took them the round of the pictures himself, and

hardly alluded to their money value. He did not seem to know much about them, but made his effect of a courtly host with what he did know, and his amiability never failed. By and by, Tony became aware that in an unobtrusive way he was manœuvring to get him apart from his aunt and his grandfather, and his fears revived, not of a disclosure, but of something to be said to him which he did not want to hear.

But presently, as the Rector and Miss Barrett were engaged at one end of the room Sir James invited Tony to look at something at the other, and he followed him down the length of it, with reluctance strong in him.

Sir James put his hand in his pocket. "Here, boy," he said, handing Tony a sovereign. "I dare say you'll find some use for that. Always liked to be tipped myself when I was a youngster. I'm going up to Scotland in a day or two, so I shan't see you again. No need to say anything about it at home."

It was over. All the weight was off Tony's mind now, and he was gay and talkative as he walked home beside his aunt and his grandfather, who seemed, as it were, restored to him, since there was nothing now to get in the way of their appreciation of him.

"What were you and Sir James confabulating about?" Miss Barrett asked him.

"Oh, he gave me a tip," said Tony, "a very handsome one. That's why I'm so lively. He told me not to say anything about it, but my gratitude is too great to keep to myself."

"He must have taken a great fancy to you," said his aunt. "I wonder what made him open out to us all like that. He was quite like a normal person."

"After all the Marches are gentle-folk," said the Rec-

tor. "One has been rather inclined to forget that of late with Sir James."

"It has sometimes been rather difficult to remember," said Miss Barrett.

"Well, yes, I know. He has got into odd ways through living so much alone. But nobody could have been nicer than he was this afternoon. And he's going off to Scotland! Well, perhaps he's made up his mind to shake himself free from the sort of life he has been living for the last few years, and this afternoon was the beginning of it. Perhaps we shall get quite friendly with him when he comes back."

"I don't want to get too friendly," said Miss Barrett, "and I do like two lumps of sugar in my tea. I think we'll have another cup when we get home, and some bread and butter. We've had a great honour done us, but I'm rather hungry."

Tony leant out of his window again that night, and examined himself more closely than on the night before. He had had an escape, and was not now inclined to make little of what might have got him into trouble. One of his best points was that he was honest with himself, or at least preferred to be. As the necessity for defending himself to other people was over, he gave up defending himself against the charges of his own conscience. He wanted to be good, as he put it in his half-childish way—to be able to approve of himself. It made one more comfortable all round, and there were such a lot of jolly things to do every day that couldn't be thoroughly enjoyed if one were hankering after something forbidden. Other fellows weren't always thinking about girls, as his inclinations led him to do. Stephen wasn't, for one. And boys that Tony admired more than Stephen kept clear

of it, though not all of them. It still rather disturbed him that his propensities had become plain to Bob Cutting. And if Bob could see through him so easily, what about the Hopwoods, and their friends, with whom he was to foregather at the end of the week? There was nothing he would hate more than to be laughed at as a prococious young philanderer by men of that sort, who were too healthy and athletic to give way to such follies themselves.

He mustn't do it. He must make up his mind not to do it, and keep to his intention. And he must keep going, keep working at something and put the whole of his mind to it. It had been great fun working with Bob down at the yard. He really had stuck to that, and never slacked, even when it had grown wearisome now and then, and nobody could have blamed him for knocking off, considering it was holiday time for him and he was working for nothing except the satisfaction of it. There would be satisfaction in doing a certain amount of work with books too, though not too much, and when the holidays were over and that sort of work would take first place—oh, how he would work, and surprise them all by what he could do if he tried!

He felt pleased with himself once more, full of energy and good resolution, with the disagreeable incident of two days before lifted off his mind now, as well as all that had led up to it. And a streak of joy shot through his mind as he thought of the pleasure he was going to have at the end of the week, which he could enjoy now with a clear conscience, and of the long weeks of holiday still before him, in this place which he loved so well. It would have been dreadful if it had all been spoilt by a trouble brought upon him so near the beginning of it. Thank goodness Alice had gone away! though, as for that, he

would have kept clear of her if she had been staying on. He ought never to have behaved himself so as to run the risk he had.

There was small doubt that he was right in looking upon Alice as a temptation that he ought to have resisted, but Alice, back in her "place," and only not crying her eyes out at this time because she had nowhere to cry alone, might have found it difficult to look upon herself as a temptation. She might, possibly, have brought herself to look upon Tony as a tempter, but she was too fond of him to make the attempt, and could only arrive at hating Sir James with all her feminine heart for having come between them.

CHAPTER XV

IFIELD COTTAGE

TONY would have found it hard to believe, at the beginning of the holidays, that he would come to look forward with some pleasure to spending the last few days of them at Ifield Cottage. As he travelled to London he thought of Merstead with more regret than if he had been going home to Ifield Lodge. Merstead Rectory was home to him now and he was leaving it. But there was a spice of home feeling about Ifield Cottage too. Mrs. Hawthorne was strict, and Tony knew that life under her rule would be very different from the easy freedom he had enjoyed, even in term-time, with his father. But he was inclined to put that aside for the moment. Stephen and Ruth, whom he had so much pitied for the strait bonds which held them, had never seemed to be made unhappy by them. They were devoted to their mother, who made their home for them, which Tony was to share. Stephen had always been his closest friend, though there had been others in whose society he had taken more pleasure from time to time. He could talk to Stephen about everything, and it would be jolly to go over all his holiday experiences with him. He had always been fond of Ruth too, whom he had known almost from her babyhood. He felt towards her as he supposed brothers felt towards their sisters. There was always something different about a house where there were girls as well as boys. Stephen and Ruth together would be better than Stephen alone.

Tony arrived at Hilbury in the afternoon. It was one of those hot golden days of late September in which summer seems to be in its very prime. It had been cold and wet at Merstead during the last few days, and summer seemed to have come to an end with the end of the holidays. But Hilbury was basking in it as Tony drove up from the station. It was cheering to see the people about. Tony waved to two school-fellows on his way, one of them in flannels, carrying a tennis racket. He hadn't had a game all the holidays, but he was going to the Hopwoods the next afternoon. Hilbury was a jolly enough place to come back to.

Tony felt no sense of sadness or even of strangeness because his cab, going by the same road, was not taking him to Ifield Lodge. It just crossed his mind as he came to the end of the Grove, below which both houses stood, that it was curious that this should be so; but he was used by this time to his own changes of feeling. Sometimes he would think of his father with no more emotion than if he had just left him but could see him again at any time; sometimes he could hardly bear to think of him at all. Apparently it was to be the same with his old home. He had been wondering how he could stand living within sight of it; but when he actually came to the point from which it could be seen he did not even look at it. His eyes were on Ifield Cottage.

A slight sense of constraint fell upon him as he sat down to tea immediately afterwards for the first time as a member of the little family. Mrs. Hawthorne had welcomed him with the same rather stiff courtesy as when he had come to the cottage as a guest, but somehow he felt her authority already. He would not be able to bear himself exactly as if he were a guest. Nor would he be able to give his tongue quite such free rein as over the

tea-table at Merstead Rectory. A sudden spasm of homesickness seized him as the vision crossed his mind of his aunt and his grandfather sitting down together at this time in the familiar far-away room. But it passed immediately; the excitement of his arrival had not yet worn off, and there was such a lot to talk about.

Good old Stephen had shown himself delighted to see him, in his chuckling, goggle-eyed way, and Ruth had been all smiles. They had only just returned from a fortnight at Hastings, having spent all the previous weeks of the holidays at home, and they were full of it. An ordinary seaside holiday, in which Stephen had done scarcely anything except in company with his mother and his sister! Tony still felt himself his superior, in the experiences he had had; but the full recital of them would be for when Stephen and he were alone together. His three days on the Broads, with the Hopwoods and their friends, had been the crown of his holiday, and he told them about that, and about his work on the *Norfolk Beauty*, and in the yard later. He smiled at Mrs. Hawthorne. "Bob Cutting offered me a job at boat-building if I ever wanted it," he said. "I really did work at it. It was much more fun than if I had been doing nothing but play all the holidays."

She gave no answering smile. "The holidays are too long for nothing but play," she said. "I hope you did some work with your books too."

Tony was pleased to be able to give a good account of himself there. During the later part of the holidays he had read "very nearly" the whole of a Greek play with his grandfather.

Stephen exclaimed at this, and Tony knew that by and by he would be asked questions, not all of which would be admiring, nor perhaps altogether free from

incredulity. But Mrs. Hawthorne took the information calmly, only showing some interest in the old Rector's classical readings, and passing on to ask after Miss Barrett.

Tony heard that Ifield Lodge had been taken, and was being done up for its new tenants. "I hope they will be nice people," he said. But Mrs. Hawthorne discouraged speculation. It did not seem that she had any intention of "calling." She had settled in Hilbury on the death of her husband eight or nine years before, and had been called upon to some extent herself, as the widow of a clergyman of some notoriety. But she had made no effort to enlarge her acquaintanceship, and had not taken the first necessary steps with people who had come there after herself and been received into the inner circles of Hilbury society. She did not know the Hopwoods, whom everybody was glad to know. Tony had only got to know them as a sort of free lance, for his father had not called upon them either. He had been inclined to crow over Stephen for the facilities he had enjoyed at the Grange, but now he had some doubts about his own position.

"Fred and Morton Hopwood were awfully kind to me on the wherry," he said. "Fred asked me to go there to tennis to-morrow. I wrote and told him I was coming here to-day. He told me to bring Stephen too—if you'd let him come."

The condition had not been in Fred Hopwood's letter. Tony added it because of that new impression of Mrs. Hawthorne's authority, which had not so much affected him while he had been at Merstead Rectory, and the sudden doubt whether his liberty to make engagements for himself was not at an end.

She did not relieve him of this doubt. "You may go to the Grange to-morrow," she said, "but during term

time you must not accept invitations. I'm afraid Stephen can't go with you; I don't know the Hopwoods."

Stephen had looked up at her with his queer sidelong glance, upon Tony's words, and looked down again at hers. If he was disappointed he did not show it. "Ruth and I are going to have a good go in at my stamps to-morrow afternoon," he said.

After tea Mrs. Hawthorne took Tony aside into the little drawing-room. He followed her not without a sinking of heart. The interview, in this room which was seldom used, seemed not without portent.

But she spoke to him kindly. "I wanted to tell you," she said, "that I am anxious that you shall be happy here with us. We cannot make up for the loss of your own home, and of your father; but you must look upon me as your friend, and I know that Stephen and Ruth will like to have you with them."

Tony mumbled words of thanks; but he thought of other home-comings, in which all the freedom of his father's house had been his, and his spirits sank, even while he felt gratitude towards her.

They did not revive as she continued. She meant him well; she had received him into her home, and made him one of her family. But it was a home strictly ordered, and he would have to conform to its ordering.

She must have it understood, but she did not lay down her rules harshly. "I know you have had much more freedom at home than most boys of your age," she said, "and it may be harder for you to get into the ways that I have thought good for Stephen, and that you must follow too. But he doesn't find them irksome, and you need not. During term-time, work must come before everything, and you must not expect more liberty from it than the boarders have. There will never be any going

out in the evenings, and now that the winter is coming there will not be time for much going out on holiday afternoons. I suppose you will play football regularly, as Stephen does, and your time will be fully taken up."

"Can't I go out to tea sometimes with my friends?" Tony asked.

"I shouldn't wish you to give up your father's friends in any way," she said, "and of course you can go out to tea sometimes, and ask your school-fellows here, as Ruth and Stephen do. But it must not be very often in term-time. I want you to see it in the light that Stephen does. You are both old enough to take your school-work seriously, and to see for yourselves that it is best to keep your minds closely fixed on it, and to have as few distractions as possible."

"Oh, I do mean to work hard," said Tony. "May I go to the Hopwoods' sometimes? They are my chief friends here."

There was a slight pause before she asked: "Were they friends of your father's?"

He was obliged to confess that they were not. "But he always liked me to go there," he said.

Her face hardened a little. "You mean, I suppose, that he allowed you to go there," she said.

Tony didn't see much difference between the two statements, but acquiesced.

She seemed to make up her mind to a decision. "I shouldn't wish you to go there, or to any house, unless it were just to run in with a school-fellow, without a definite invitation. And then I should wish you to ask me. I know that your father did not put those restrictions on you, and I am not criticizing him. But if I were to give you the same liberty as you have had before, it would not be fair upon Stephen. I think you must see that."

Tony could always see a point of fairness, and accepted the restrictions imposed upon him, but with no light heart. It seemed to him that Mrs. Hawthorne had a particular dislike to his going to the Hopwoods, and he wondered why. Perhaps she was a little jealous. They lived in one of the largest houses in Hilbury, to which invitations meant more than to other houses. Tony was rather proud of having been made free of the Grange on that account, and the little bit of snobbery coloured his whole thoughts of the Hopwoods, even to the extent of assigning a share of it to Mrs. Hawthorne.

But her next words gave a new turn to his mind. "Have you written to Mrs. Henry Dare lately?" she asked.

It came to him then in a flash that Laura had been making mischief. She had always been jealous of his having been made free of the Grange.

"I hardly ever do write to her," he answered with a shade of sulkiness. "I wrote to Henry last week."

"She would like you to spend a night with them before school begins. I thought you might go on Monday."

"I'd much rather not go at all," said Tony. "Laura doesn't really like me. I hardly ever went to their house when father was alive. I'd rather stay with you."

She showed no gratification at this expression of preference, and did not comment upon what he had said about Laura. "I think your brother will expect to see you," she said, "and you can hardly expect him to come here, when you can go there. You had better write and say you will go on Monday. Perhaps you could meet Mr. Henry at his office and go home with him, and come back the next morning."

"I'd like that better than anything, if I must go," said Tony.

It seemed to him that the word "must" was going to play a considerable part in his new life, and he did not like it; but Mrs. Hawthorne told him again before he left her that she was pleased to have him there, and then he was free to go out with Stephen, in whose company there would be no more constraint than before.

They walked to the Common and back, a mile each way. The burning day was closing in sharp coolness, and it was nearly dark before they returned. They passed the lodge gates of the Grange, to which Tony would have hurried before this in the days of his liberty. But he and Stephen were in such busy talk that it did not strike him that it was forbidden him. "I wish you could come here to-morrow," he said.

"Just as well not," said Stephen cheerfully. "I might cut you out. I say, tell us about the wherry. You were a lucky dog to get that."

"It was the best time I had all the holidays," said Tony. "I should have had a whole fortnight of it if they had come later on, but I didn't want to leave home for so long just at first. Hard luck, rather, because I missed H. B. Greeley. He had to go off to play for the Gentlemen."

"Pity you couldn't have had him, so that you could gas about it at school; but I suppose the others made a pet of you all right."

Stephen seemed to be working up to one of his insulting moods, but Tony was so glad to be with him again that he didn't mind; and he could always squash him if he went too far. He drew for Stephen's benefit a picture of their gliding progress past flowery banks and sleepy waterside villages, the early morning bathing, the sailing of their dinghy, the evening walks to the villages or farm-houses for milk and eggs and butter, the meals in the

cabin, with talk and laughter going on all the time, the conversations to which Tony had listened while his friends smoked their pipes under the stars. "It was awfully interesting to listen to them," he said. "They had all been at Cambridge, except Blake, who had been at Oxford, and Hewitt, who was an architect, and could paint too. You know, Stephen, it made me absolutely determined to go to the varsity if I possibly can."

"I wish you could," said Stephen. "I wish we could go together. But you say your brother wouldn't let you?"

"Well, I talked to Fred and Morton Hopwood about that, and to Blake too. Blake was at Oxford. I think I'd rather go to Oxford than to Cambridge; but if I went to Cambridge I should want to go to Trinity. Blake's an awfully interesting fellow. He's a leader-writer on the 'Standard.' His father died while he was at Harrow, and he got through Oxford on scholarships; but they weren't enough, so he wrote things all the time he was there and made money by it. And he took a jolly good degree and got his fellowship, and he played cricket for his College, and was very well known and all that. He did simply everything, but he knew all the time he'd have to make his own living directly he went down. I think it's splendid, don't you?"

"I suppose that's what you're going to do. What did the Hopwoods say about it?"

"Well, you see Fred Hopwood is rather a big man in the City already. He did say that unless you had a good business open to you to step into you ought to begin at it early. But I don't really care about the idea of business. I know last term I only wanted to go to the varsity because I should enjoy myself there, and of course that *would* have been waste of time. But now I

should go with the idea of preparing myself for something. Don't you think it makes a difference?"

"H'm!" Stephen wasn't prepared to commit himself. "I wish you could go," he said again. "Perhaps if you sap hard this term, and soar up the Sixth!"

They talked about school work. Stephen was not unimpressed by what Tony told him he had done in the holidays. "I thought you were just making yourself out the boy, at tea," he said. "And I've known these bursts before. But of course if you do take to sapping, and stick to it—!"

"Oh, there'll be something worth working for. I shall stick to it all right. And there won't be much else to do either."

There was a slightly awkward pause. Tony hadn't meant to say so much. But it was true. "Your mater was awfully nice to me," he said. "I quite see that it's better to stick to your work in term-time, and not go slacking about, as I used to do."

"Well, you did work sometimes," said Stephen encouragingly. "And there's no doubt you're the boy with the brains."

"I haven't told you about the shooting," said Tony. "It was getting just a trifle slow at Merstead, though of course I always like being there. But on the first of September they began to shoot partridges. The shooting at Merstead is let to Lord Gunton, and there are more partridges there than on his own place. So he began at Merstead. I knew the head gamekeeper, and he said I could be one of the beaters if I liked. There was going to be a big party. So I put on my oldest clothes, because I didn't want them to know who I was."

"Who were you?" asked Stephen in his disconcerting way; but Tony passed this by.

"I didn't think anybody would recognize me," he said. "But who do you think was out shooting with them that day?"

"The Shah," suggested Stephen.

"Roy Carrington. You know I told you I met him at the Hopwoods."

"Yes, you told me that all right."

"He recognized me, and was awfully decent. He introduced me to Lord Gunton, and he asked me to go out with the guns the next day."

"Did you put on your oldest clothes?"

"Funny ass! It was the greatest luck. It was a fine day—it had been pouring the day before—and the ladies came out. We had lunch in the orchard of a jolly old farmhouse. There was a table and chairs, and a jolly good lunch, and footmen to wait."

"Golly!" said Stephen.

"I made friends with a lot of them."

"Of course you did. You're the boy for that."

"Well, it was such a lark, and I couldn't help laughing and enjoying myself. They were awfully decent to me, and Lady Gunton asked me to go and stay there before I went back to school."

"Golly! And did you?"

Tony laughed. "I couldn't because I hadn't got any dress clothes," he said.

"Hard luck! Did you tell 'em that?"

"No—I said I'd ask my aunt, and she made some excuse. But I went there to lunch, and they sent a dog-cart over for me and sent me back in it. Jolly decent of them, wasn't it? They asked me to go and see them in London. I say, do you think Mrs. Hawthorne will let me?"

"Not in term-time," said Stephen; there fell a pause.

"Has Laura been to see Mrs. Hawthorne?" Tony asked in a different tone.

"Yes," said Stephen. "She came several times when they were moving things out of Ifield Lodge. Oh, I say, Tony, I've been meaning to tell you, only you talk such a lot—we met another aunt of yours at Hastings."

"An aunt of mine? I've only got one aunt. Oh, you mean Aunt Charlotte. I'd forgotten all about her. But she's Henry's aunt; I've hardly ever seen her. Yes, of course, she lives at Hastings. How did you come across her? She's a funny old thing, isn't she?"

"She's a jolly nice old thing. She tipped me and Ruth half a sov each, and apologized for making so bold. Golly! I wasn't taking any offence. We all went to tea with her. She's got five pugs and a musical box that cost sixty pounds."

"Is she rich then? Does she live in a big house?"

"No, but it's a jolly comfortable one, and she gave us such a spread. I wish we'd come across her before, cos she liked us. She likes you too. She thinks you're the boy."

"Well, that's rum. I remember her coming to Ifield Lodge once, but I was quite a kid. I had a sort of idea that my father didn't care for her much. He never used to talk about her. But Henry and Laura did sometimes. They used to go and stay with her."

"Yes, but—"

"What were you going to say?"

"I don't think she cares much about Mrs. Henry. She began on her with mother, but mother shut her up. She likes Henry though. She said she was going to leave him her money."

This surprising statement renewed Tony's impressions of Aunt Charlotte—a voluble rather foolish woman with

a giggle, whom his father had treated with more than his usual reserve. He seemed to see her as having been somewhat out of place at Ifield Lodge, and feeling herself to be so. He could not have formed that impression entirely of his own recollections of her; perhaps he had acquired some of it from old Nanny. He had certainly thought of her as not belonging to the sort of people from whom his own mother had come, though suitable enough for a relation of Henry's. But that was an uncomfortable thought now.

It was pleasant enough to get back to the cottage, to the cosy lamp-lit parlour in which all the family life was lived. Tony knew that Stephen did his preparation there during term-time, with Ruth doing hers at the same table, and Mrs. Hawthorne in the room all the time, reading or sewing. Stephen and he would have no place of their own, except the bedroom that they were to share together. The sense of confinement would be strong when that time came. But on the first evening there was an agreeable sense of companionship. Ruth and Stephen and Tony played games at the round table. Mrs. Hawthorne had her needlework, but joined in the talk occasionally, and only once reproved Stephen, for saying Golly! At nine o'clock a supper tray was brought in, and Ruth went to bed. At half past nine Mrs. Hawthorne read prayers, and after that Tony and Stephen went to bed. At ten o'clock she came up to say good-night to them, and their single candle was not allowed to be lighted again after that.

Tony wondered how he was going to stick it; but it was only a phrase that rose to his mind. He had stuck it very well so far, and for this night at least was glad to go to sleep at once.

CHAPTER XVI

HENRY

ON Tony's first awaking at Ifield Cottage, when he had realized where he was, which was not until he had consciously opened his eyes, it seemed to him that he ought to have been plunged into a condition of gloom. The scene upon which his eyes rested was so very different from that which would have greeted him if he had opened them in the large well-furnished room that had been his at Ifield Lodge, or even from the bare spaciousness of his room at Merstead Rectory. There were only three bedrooms in Ifield Cottage, and this was one of the larger of them; but its space was pretty well occupied with the two beds, and the cumbrous furniture that had been bought for a larger house. The ceiling was low, and the light came from a dormer window not over large. It was impossible to think of a writing-table in it, or of using it in any way as a place of retirement. It was for dressing and undressing and going to bed in. It marked the restrictions under which his life would henceforth be led. He would share it with Stephen, and he would share the downstairs rooms with Mrs. Hawthorne and Ruth and Stephen. He would never have any privacy at Ifield Cottage.

But the deprivation did not strike him, upon his waking to it, with the sense of loss for which he had been prepared. He felt not less exhilaration of mind than at Ifield Lodge, when the holidays had been nearly over and the excitements of school were about to begin again.

The change was rather greater than it had been before, and the more interesting on that account. He accepted the fact that he wasn't unduly cast down, as he lay awake for a time, with Stephen almost but not quite snoring in the bed by his side, as a symptom of the meritorious state of mind at which he had arrived, and augured well from it. His intention and desire for the moment were certainly to devote his whole energies to excelling in the school work which would begin in a few days. Once before he had begun the term with that intention, and looked back on it with peculiar pleasure.

It had been the summer term in which he had started near to the top of the Fourth Form. He had slacked the term before, or he might have got one of the few interim removes into the Lower Fifth. It seemed to him that here was a good chance of winning prizes. If he could keep it up to the end of the term it was certainly within his power to finish at the top of the Form, and so partake in the glories of Speech Day. Work was his pre-occupation. He used to get up as early as five o'clock in the morning, and learn his rules and his paradigms and his "rep" walking slowly round the garden. This was enjoyable in itself, in the fresh morning air, with the flowers all about him; and going off to school was a pleasure too, with his work prepared so thoroughly that anticipations of triumph took the place of uneasy doubts whether, with luck, he would be able to scrape through.

He finished second instead of first. Kitson had come up from the Third, and beat him, though a year younger. Kitson was one of the scholastic lights of the school, and was nearly at the top of the Sixth now, where Tony was just about to begin at the bottom. He had the better brain, at least for Greek and Latin. It wasn't in Tony's

power to beat him, though he struggled hard for the greater part of the term. It was towards the end of it that he got to know the Hopwoods, and tennis at the Grange on Sundays, and sometimes elsewhere on Wednesday afternoons, and in the long evenings, took off from the hours he had hitherto spent at his work. But if he was not quite so near to Kitson at the end of the term as he might have been, he ran a good second, and could always look back upon that term, now two years ago, with satisfaction. He had enjoyed it more than other terms, and the steady work he had done in it had accounted for part of his enjoyment.

Well, that was how he would take his work this term, and for the rest of his time at school. There would be no chance of prizes, none at least for the coming year. He was in the ruck, and it would take him a long time to emerge from it. But there would be some competition, among those with whom he had gone up, and some who had preceded him. He ought to be able to gain a place or two every term. And there would be a big prize to work for at the end of the two years; for by this time he had quite made up his mind to persuade Henry to give him his chance of Oxford or Cambridge, if he could show himself worthy of it.

With these ambitions, the constraints of Ifield Cottage took on a new aspect. His imagination had warmed to Mrs. Hawthorne's appeal to take responsibility on himself, and to consider the rules she had laid down as designed to forward the idea of strenuous work, and not as irksome prohibitions. He was quite capable of doing that. He knew that he could be distracted from a purpose by pleasures, and the last thing he wanted was to be distracted from his present high purpose. He would be in the atmosphere of work, during the next few months,

in school and out of it; and at the end of them would come the Christmas holidays, to be spent at Merstead, which he would enjoy all the more because of the good work behind him. Ifield Cottage wasn't such a bad place to wake up in.

The unseasonably hot weather showed no signs of breaking. As Tony hurried up the drive of the Grange that afternoon it seemed just as it had been when he had been there last July. The summer delights would be in full swing. He must make the best of them, since it was the last time he would enjoy them there.

But it was something of a disappointment after all. There were as many people there as before the holidays, but they were mostly people from Hilbury itself. One of the few exceptions was a good-looking young man with the red and blue tie of the Guards, and a gaudy Zingari sash, whom Tony had not seen there before. He was much taken up with Maud, and she did not seem to object to his attentions. Tony had looked forward to a long farewell talk with Maud, but although she expressed pleasure at the sight of him, and introduced him to Captain St. Leger, and had a word and a smile for him occasionally, she seemed no longer to be at his disposal.

She seemed to him much older than when he had last seen her. She had her hair up now. She was prettier than ever, with her eyes sparkling and her cheeks a little flushed. But she was quite grown-up, and hardly seemed the same girl as the one from whom Tony had contemplated snatching a kiss only a few months before. His mind was clear of all such ideas now, in whatever connection, but he wanted to keep Maud as a pal, and to tell her that if he wouldn't be seeing much of her now it wouldn't be his fault.

After tea he asked her boldly to go for a stroll with him, since that seemed to be the only way of getting her alone. He had to do it while she was in company with Captain St. Leger, who did not seem pleased, having possibly some intention of asking for the same thing himself. But Maud at once consented, with the sweet kind smile that came so readily to her lips. "I haven't seen Tony for months," she said, "and there's a lot we want to talk about. But we shan't be long."

Tony thought she might have omitted this reassurance of a complete stranger—complete at least to him; but Captain St. Leger was manifestly soothed by the promise, and told Tony in a spirit of badinage not to let her get her feet wet. Tony might have begun with some enquiries about this Captain St. Leger, but she began herself, almost hurriedly, with questions about what he had been doing. She also slipped her arm into his, in full view of Captain St. Leger and anybody who might have been looking, which gratified him. It had been natural for him to slip his arm into hers, in the spirit of friendship, but he would not have done so this afternoon, as she seemed to have grown so much away from him.

They walked up and down a path between two borders, full of the rank growth of Michaelmas daisies and perennial sunflowers, and such of the summer flowers as had kept awake beyond their usual bedtime. The air was already sharp and cool, and a heavy dew had begun to fall.

Tony told her of the embargo that had been put upon him, and she was a little indignant about it, but said she would get her mother to write to Mrs. Hawthorne to ask if he could come and see them sometimes. "I suppose we are as much your friends here as anybody," she said. "I think she ought to let you come as often as you did

before. Poor Tony! I was so sorry for you. I didn't say half I meant in my letter."

Tony was a little embarrassed; but absolute sincerity was needed on this subject. "I was awfully unhappy at the time," he said; "and I am sometimes still, but not always." Even as he said it he felt a pang. "It's so different, not going back to be with father to-morrow," he said.

"Yes, I know," she said sympathetically. "I'm afraid it will be rather horrid for you with the Hawthornes, won't it? I don't know Mrs. Hawthorne, but she looks disagreeable."

"No, she isn't that," said Tony at once. "Of course she's strict, but it's more in term-time than in the holidays. I'm not altogether sorry for it really. I've got to work very hard, and it will be easier not being *allowed* to slack. I used to love coming here, and shall miss not coming awfully; but of course it did interfere with work."

"Well, I don't think it did you any harm, and I hope you will be able to come sometimes. I shall talk to mother about it, Tony."

After that she seemed to be wanting to get back, and Tony found that he hadn't much more to say to her. But he felt unhappy as he delivered her up to Captain St. Leger. She had been awfully sweet to him, but somehow the close friendship which he had flattered himself existed between them seemed to have come to an end. She would get her mother to ask for him to come again, but she wouldn't much care whether he came or not.

He was more unhappy still as he went home an hour or two later. They had all been very kind to him, but he was not necessary to any of them. They had accepted the fact that his lot in life was different from

what it had been, and very different from theirs. He didn't belong to people like that any more; he belonged to the restricted life of the Hawthornes, and of Henry and Laura; and his freedom to make his own life, and to make his own way, was taken from him.

There was a different atmosphere about Ifield Cottage to-night. Ruth had gone to bed when he got home, and Mrs. Hawthorne and Stephen were preparing to go, in the businesslike way of a small house, in which everything had to be left tidy, so as not to give more work than necessary. Tony didn't feel at all sleepy, and had never gone to bed at Ifield Lodge until he did, and not always then. But he had to go up with Stephen, and Stephen wasn't in one of his most sympathetic moods. He tried to be funny, without any success in Tony's estimation. Stephen could be tiresome enough at times, with his eternal chaff. Tony snapped at him as they undressed. "If I were at home," he said illogically, "I should be enjoying myself at the Grange now. It's a pretty poor exchange to have to listen to your rot."

Stephen left off at once. "Hard luck on you, old fellow," he said. "But I was wishing you were here this evening, and I suppose I got a bit above my self when you did come home."

This put matters right between them, but they did not talk after they had got into bed, and Tony lay awake for a long time, wishing that when he went to sleep he would never wake again.

On Monday afternoon, taking a hand-bag with him, he went to the City, to Henry's office. When he had gone to see his father there, he had always been interested in the crowded streets, and the shops, and the hawkers with their barrows. The seven minutes' walk between the station and the office reminded him of the

times when he had come up to meet his father, perhaps to lunch with him, and to be taken to some entertainment. It was different now, but he was rather pleased to be going to see Henry. The antagonism between them had died down. Henry had written to him once or twice during the holidays, and always kindly. And he had something momentous to settle with him.

He went by devious ways, a little proud of himself for knowing the short cuts, through a building used as a thoroughfare from one street to another, through what had once been the churchyard of an ancient church, and by a side way into the enclosed space in which the office was situated. It was on the ground floor at the back of the buildings, lit only by a skylight. Mr. Richards, the cheerful grey-bearded head clerk, got off his high stool to welcome him as he passed through the little swing door by the counter. He shook hands with him, humming a tune as he did so, to show that he knew that times had changed since the last time he had seen him there, but didn't want to talk about it. And Benson, the shipping clerk, also got down from his stool and shook hands with him, and said he was looking brown. The office boy, a recent addition to the staff, was busy with the copying press at the back of the office, and looked at him with interest. Then he went into the inner room which had been his father's and was now Henry's.

Henry was sitting at the desk that he had always used since he had become a partner. Mr. Dare's big desk was closed, but his chair was in front of it, and seemed to be waiting for him. A big enlarged photograph of him hung over the mantelpiece, having taken the place of a picture of "S.S. Arethusa," that had hung there before. The room was only a partitioned off space, lit by the same skylight, though a thick Turkey carpet and

a leather-covered easy-chair gave it some semblance of a room. It was gratefully cool on this hot day, and very quiet, though within a few yards of the rumble of the street.

Henry showed himself pleased to see Tony, and said they would be off in a few minutes. Mr. Richards came in immediately after him, and they settled some point between them while Tony waited.

Henry seemed slightly to have altered to Tony's observant eyes—to have grown in importance. Mr. Richards called him "Mr. Henry," as he had always done since he had been taken into partnership, and put in an occasional "sir" in addressing him, though he had been a friend of his father's youth, and had known Henry since his childhood. There was a slight difference of opinion between them. Mr. Richards produced his arguments, and Henry overruled them. When the point was settled Mr. Richards lingered to ask Tony when school began, and said that Mrs. Richards would have been glad if he could have stayed a night with them, but perhaps it would be better to leave it till next holidays. Henry joined in. It was all very friendly. The formality had been only a convention between the head of the firm and his clerk.

Tony walked with Henry through the crowded streets, Henry, with his slight limp, carrying a basket of fish which he had picked up in the market through which they had passed. Everybody seemed in a hurry. Henry took his ticket for him, and presented it to be punched. On his previous visits it had always been a third-class ticket, and Henry had relinquished the benefits of his "season" to travel with him. But this evening Tony travelled first-class, as he had always done with his father. There was one little economy which it faintly amused

Tony to see that Henry still practised. He had brought his morning paper with him, and read it while the other men in the carriage were all reading evening papers. Tony, who hadn't a paper to read, looked out at the back-yards of the houses below the embankment, some of them festooned with the items of the weekly wash, some of them turned into chicken-runs, some meagrely cultivated as gardens, and tried to adjust himself to a view of Henry in his father's place—a settled place, with no prospect of any outstanding changes in it, but with the power of directing whatever changes there should be in Tony's life.

But Henry soon laid down his paper, to talk to him in an undertone, as they were carried on past the rows of little back-yards into regions where they gave place to veritable little gardens, with trees and flowers and tiny lawns in them.

It was not yet the opportunity for opening up the subject of which Tony's mind was full. There was not much to talk about, and a slight constraint fell upon Tony as he told Henry of some of his doings during the holidays, knowing that he wouldn't be much interested in them. Still, he knew that Henry only meant to be kind. "You and Laura haven't been away at all, have you?" he asked.

"No, there was such a lot to do, settling up about Ifield Lodge. I took a day off occasionally. It was rather jolly to stay at home, and look after the garden; and we played tennis at the club. There were more people there than you would have thought. And we went about looking at houses. We shan't move for another year, but it's rather fun making up your mind what sort of a house you want, and if you see one that you like thinking what you would do with it."

Mr. Dare's death had made that much change in Henry's life, that he could afford to live in a larger house now. But even that was for the future. He was content to go on in his narrow way, and gain satisfaction from what must have been a considerable access of income in making plans for the distant future.

"Was everything sold out of Ifield Lodge?" Tony asked. Stephen had told him that there had been an auction there, but Henry had said nothing about it in his letters.

"No, I've kept a good deal of the furniture, which I have stored for the present. I've kept some of the things for you too. I didn't sell many books. I've got some of them at home, but there will be some for you. I suppose you wouldn't have anywhere to put them at present. But there's one thing I've got for you which I think you may like to have now—that portrait of your mother that was in father's bedroom. You might like to take it back with you. And I'm going to give you father's watch, and a few other things of his. I've got them ready for you."

Tony was cheered by this. He had got it so into his mind that everything that had been his father's was now Henry's that he had thought no more about it. But a gold watch was a treasure to be proud of, which he could enjoy now; and the mention of "other things" held expectations for which he had not been prepared.

Henry's house was in a comparatively new road some ten minutes' walk from the station along other new roads lined with little houses. They were built in pairs. Each had a little square of garden in front behind iron railings, most of which were backed by clipped privet hedges. Laburnums and mayes and almonds had been planted in some of them, and had grown to a respectable size. All

the gardens except those in which there was a "To Let" board were neatly kept, and the houses were neat too, and seemed to be taking a pride in themselves. Some of them had striped awnings in front of the windows; all of them had the lace curtains of summer time. "It's wonderful how all this has grown up since we came here," Henry said. "I don't believe you'll find nicer little houses anywhere within such easy reach of the City. Perhaps some day you will be settling down in a house like this, Tony. They're just the thing to begin married life in."

Tony saw Laura at the window as they went through the gate, but she turned back into the room and did not come out to meet them. When they went in she expressed some surprise at their being home so early. She gave Tony one of the cold kisses that he disliked so much, but said she was glad to see him. "It's a long time since you've favoured us," she said.

Their evening meal was high tea at half past six, and it was six o'clock now, and beginning to get dark. Henry took Tony into the garden at the back of the house, which was overlooked from the windows of other houses, but had trees and shrubs high enough to afford some privacy. It was all neatly brushed and combed, and Henry was proud of it, and pointed out what he had been doing.

Tony was shown his room. It had been sparsely furnished when he had slept in it before, but now it was as full of furniture as it would hold, and the walls were covered with pictures. One of them was a water-colour that had hung in his bed-room at Ifield Lodge. It had been the same in the drawing-room, and in the dining-room which he had passed through to get to the garden. Laura had been busy with her new possessions. She

must have enjoyed the breaking up of Ifield Lodge. And she had evidently chosen the best. The furniture in this little spare room crowded it unduly, but would look well in the larger house for which no doubt it was intended. The pictures seemed to belong to the room already, and the ornaments on the mantelpiece, some of which had been in the drawing-room of Ifield Lodge, gave it a sumptuous appearance.

CHAPTER XVII

LAURA

LAURA wasn't so bad after all. Tony had a few minutes alone with her in the drawing-room before Henry came down.

"How do you think the things from Ifield Lodge look?" she asked him. "It was rather difficult to get them in without overcrowding the room, but I took a great deal of trouble in choosing the right ones."

Tony said shortly that they looked all right, his antagonism beginning to rise against her for asking him the question. But she went on: "I'm afraid it can't be very agreeable for you to see them here. Still, you wouldn't be able to have what we've saved for you yet. Did Henry tell you?"

"He said I was to have father's watch and some other things."

"Yes, there's a pair of silver brushes, and some gold links, and one or two other things that you can have now. But we've saved you some of the furniture too. Henry says he likes having things about him that he was brought up with, and you will too when you have a home of your own."

"Yes, I shall," said Tony. "Thanks very much."

Nearly all the silver and china used at their meal had come from Ifield Lodge. It gave the table a well-furnished appearance, and the meal itself was of different quality from the high teas that Tony had had there before. It was to all intents, except for the tea equip-

age, a dinner, and the maid who served it was as ornamental in her evening uniform as the maids of Ifield Lodge—apparently a more highly priced article than the “generals” of former days. There was a different atmosphere about the whole house. Nothing was left to desire in it now, except more space. There was almost as much difference now between Henry’s and Laura’s way of living and that of Ifield Cottage, or of Merstead Rectory, as if they had gone on at Ifield Lodge; and it was ways of living that were of such importance to Tony. All the superiority in this respect seemed to be shifting from him to Henry.

Tony wanted to hear more about Aunt Charlotte, who had risen again on his horizon. The pinched expression which he knew so well descended on Laura’s face when he told them of the Hawthornes’ meeting her at Hastings. She wanted to know how they had met, but Stephen hadn’t told him that. Henry intervened, rather awkwardly. “She came to see me at the office a few weeks ago. I told her that Tony was going to live with the Hawthornes, and that they were going to Hastings. She said she would go and see Mrs. Hawthorne.”

Laura looked surprised. “You never told me you had seen her,” she said.

“She came to see me on business.”

It seemed to Tony that this marked a change in the relations between Henry and Laura as he had known them. Henry had always dutifully submitted his doings to her inspection. Was he going to claim independence of action now?

It was plain that Laura was not pleased, but she said nothing to show it. “I should think Mrs. Hawthorne and Aunt Charlotte would get on very well together,” she said.

From what Tony remembered of what Stephen had told him of Aunt Charlotte she was as unlike Mrs. Hawthorne as one woman could be unlike another. But it showed that Laura did not approve of Mrs. Hawthorne. Tony thought of asking her why; but he was not feeling antagonistic towards her at the moment. Perhaps she would disclose the reason if the subject was kept alive.

"Stephen said that Aunt Charlotte was very kind to him and Ruth," he said.

"I wonder Mrs. Hawthorne allowed them to take it," said Laura.

Both Henry and Tony laughed, but Laura had not, apparently, meant to say anything funny. "It is very curious," she said, "how little principle there really is in all that anti-Catholic religion."

Oh, so that was it! It was the High Church Laura whose corns had been trodden on in some way. "The Hawthornes have given up going to St. John's," said Tony, and her surprised interest was again aroused. "She told Stephen," he said, "that we were going to St. Mary's,"—this was the Hilbury parish church—"in term-time."

"Then you've got me to thank for it," Laura said. "I told her that Henry and I didn't want you to go to St. John's. She didn't take it at all well, but if she was going to give way I think she might have said so."

"It would have been pretty ghastly fagging down there every Sunday," said Tony. "I must say I was rather dreading it, and had been meaning to ask if I could go to the School chapel."

"I supposed she wouldn't care about your not all going to church together," said Henry. "I think it does her credit that she should have decided as she did."

Laura smiled at Tony. "Henry and I don't quite

agree about Mrs. Hawthorne," she said, in the tone of one making allowances.

"I think it's a pity," said Henry firmly, "to criticize her to Tony."

Laura put on her patient look, but said no more.

Just as the meal was ending there came a note asking if Henry would step round to a neighbour's for an hour. Laura encouraged him to step round, saying that she and Tony would be quite happy together. "He wants to talk to you about the Fund," she said cryptically, and Henry presently departed. "I shan't be long," he said to Tony. "We'll have a good talk together when I come back."

Tony thought he had never known Laura so amiable as when they sat together in the drawing-room, she with her embroidery and he in the depths of an easy-chair that had come from Ifield Lodge. She had certainly made the best of her new acquisitions. He saw the room with different eyes now. If it had changed her to such an extent to have all these things, and a more elaborate life with them, he was not inclined to grudge her anything.

She returned to the subject. "When we move into a better house, and can use all the things we have kept, it will be still more like coming home to you, I hope. I should like you to think of our house as your home, Tony—at any rate to come to sometimes."

This was handsome, if it was meant, and there seemed no reason why it shouldn't be. Laura wasn't a bad sort if you took her in the right way. He had not thought that she would have cared much about his way of life at Ifield Cottage, but she asked him questions, and commiserated with him more than was actually necessary about Mrs. Hawthorne's strictness.

"I don't really mind it," said Tony. "You see I do want to make work the chief thing this term." He laughed. "I haven't always stuck to my good intentions; *you* know that. It will be easier than it was at home."

"I've sometimes thought I used to be rather hard on you," said the adaptable Laura. "It was only natural at your age, with so much freedom allowed you, that—er— I'm glad you are taking it so well now, Tony. I think it shows a good spirit that you can accept the very different sort of life you will have to live with the Hawthornes in the way you do. I know Henry will be pleased too. He doesn't see that it *is* difficult for you—at least not so clearly as I do; and he takes rather a different view of Mrs. Hawthorne."

"Why don't you like her?" asked Tony, reclining at his ease with his eyes upon her, demurely stitching. He felt that he could ask her anything at this moment without giving offence.

She did not take offence, but she put the question aside.

"It's not a matter of liking or not liking," she said. "What did Mrs. Hawthorne say exactly about Aunt Charlotte?"

"Oh, she's never mentioned her to me. It was Stephen who told me about her. What's she really like? She's rich, isn't she?"

"I suppose she has a good income, but I'm not really interested in that sort of thing. Henry's mother had money, and I suppose she has too. People of that sort think a great deal of their money."

It was news to Tony that Henry's mother had had money, and he put the fact away in his mind for further consideration. "She did say that she was going to leave her money to Henry," he said, and wondered how she would take that.

Her eyes were on her work. "It would be very wrong of her not to," she said, "as he is her only relation. But she must not expect to be allowed to dictate because of it. There are people who will always truckle to those who have money, and they get to expect it. Tell me about your work this term, Tony. I do hope you will be successful with it, and get some prizes."

So Laura and Aunt Charlotte had fallen out, but he wasn't to be told about it. "I couldn't get prizes," he said. "All I can do will be to work my way up, and that's what I'm very keen to do. I say, Laura, do you think if I do work hard, and never slack, Henry might let me go to Oxford after all?"

He was half sorry that he had disclosed himself to her the moment after. Certainly he would never have thought of doing so an hour before; but his mind was full of the momentous question, and his suspicion of Laura was so in abeyance that the words had escaped him almost against his will.

"Is that what you want particularly?" she asked.

Then he had to tell her how much he wanted it, and why. "I don't really care about business," he said at the end of it. "I'm sure I could get into something I should like better, if— But of course I couldn't expect Henry to do it unless he could really trust me to work hard. If at the end of a year at school he knew that I had, do you think he would? I should be awfully grateful."

She had listened to him, her eyes on her work all the time. "I'm sure Henry would want to do what was right and fair," she said, without raising them.

Tony's heart sank. What a fool he had been to unbosom himself to her! Now she would work against him with Henry.

She raised her eyes. "What I don't think Henry would do," she said, "would be to keep open your place in the business."

"Oh, no; he said that, and I don't think that *would* be fair." His hopes revived again. "I *know* I could make my own way when I left the varsity, and perhaps before." Then he told her about his friend Blake.

She did not seem particularly interested. "You see, Henry could take in a partner now, if he wanted to," she said, "and get a good deal of money for it. Neither of us think it would be right to do that, because we feel that we *ought* to give you the chance."

Put in this way, it seemed as if Tony would be conferring a positive benefit by relinquishing his claims upon the business. Laura seemed inclined to take that view too. Disinterested as she had proclaimed herself, of course she had an eye for herself, and it would put less strain upon her altruism if he could show her that what would benefit him would benefit her too. "I think it's awfully good of Henry—and you—to want to keep it open for me," he said. "But I don't think I should be much good at it. I should be taking money that ought to be coming to you, and I would rather earn my living in another way. I'm sure I could."

"Yes, I think you could, Tony. You're clever: there's no doubt of it. If you'll work!"

He assured her once more; he would work like a nigger with that in front of him.

She said she thought it would be best to say nothing to Henry at present. The time to approach him would be when there was something substantial to go upon. Then she thought that between them they might prevail upon him. "It would mean providing money for some years," she said. "But I shouldn't grudge that, and I

don't think Henry would, if he thought it was really for your benefit."

As Tony journeyed back to Hilbury next morning he felt vaguely dissatisfied. Perhaps Laura was right in advising him to say nothing to Henry until he had proved himself, but the prohibition had somehow come between them. In the talk they had had together he had not been able to express himself freely. He had told Henry how hard he meant to work, and Henry had said that he must learn to rely upon himself. The way was open to him and the more he learnt to apply himself at school the more he would do when he came to business. He had taken it for granted that that was all settled, and Tony had had to keep quiet about his own desires, with the consequence that Henry had noticed a drop in the temperature and hardened a little; which had caused Tony to harden in his turn. There were years of friction behind the better understanding at which they had arrived, and only a thin crust for it to break through at any time. Henry had bought him a paper, and read his own as they travelled up to town together. On saying good-bye to him he had given him a sovereign, which was so far satisfactory; but if it was meant for his term's pocket money it would be a poor exchange for the half a crown a week he had had from his father, with tips besides.

The really satisfactory thing was the gold watch he had in his pocket, and the links and studs and brushes he had in his bag. He had taken out the watch several times travelling up to London, and now that he was in a carriage by himself, travelling against the tide of incoming City men, he could refresh himself with a look at the other things.

It was Laura who had given them to him that morning, all carefully wrapped up in tissue paper. Her

amiability had lasted to the end, and she had said that she hoped he would often come to see them. With the elasticity of his youth, and his temperament, which responded to kindness, he had put his dislike of Laura away from him. He had unexpectedly enjoyed his visit, and Laura was responsible for that rather than Henry. All the same, he distrusted her a little. The simile of the leopard and its spots rose to his mind. Laura had been such a cat. Was it possible that she had completely changed? And if so what had brought about the change?

Well, there was nothing much for her to exercise her cattiness over now. He was no longer in the enjoyment of what she might have felt belonged to her rather than to him. He had long since come to admit to himself that she had had some reason to dislike him for the airs of superiority he had given himself over her and Henry, and blushed now when he thought of certain passages between them. Still it was decent of her not to bear malice, or to crow over him now that the tables were turned. Perhaps he could trust her to further his views with Henry when the time came. He would have to, as he had put himself into her hands. But he wished now that he had spoken to Henry about it instead of to her.

It was rather nice to get back to Ifield Cottage. He would never have thought that he would come to feel like that about it. Stephen came blundering out to meet him, and asked, "Well, what luck?"

Ruth was just behind him, and he did not want to discuss a matter that he had confided only to Stephen before her. But Stephen never had had any tact and probably never would have. He showed them his watch, and they were loud in their admiration. Henry, prompted by gardener's pride, had given him a sheaf of roses for Mrs. Hawthorne, and he had stopped at a shop after he

had left Henry and spent a fraction of his sovereign in chocolates for Ruth, who was not accustomed to such attentions. The three of them were very friendly as they went off to play tennis with one of Ruth's school-fellows, with injunctions from Mrs. Hawthorne not to be late for dinner. Ruth talked and laughed more freely than she had usually done with him. He was beginning to have a new sort of feeling about her, not at all allied to the emotions which had been aroused in him upon first noticing a girl as rather attractive. Ruth was certainly attractive when she woke up in that way and shed her primness, and he would have liked all the world to notice it. He supposed it was the brotherly feeling coming out in him. And after the various knocks he had received it was gratifying that she still looked up to him as somebody rather splendid.

It was rather too hot to play tennis with any vigour. The boys tired first and retired to a couple of hammocks, while the girls played a single.

"Well, what happened about the varsity?" enquired Stephen.

"What did you want to ask me for in front of Ruth?" said Tony. "It isn't safe to tell you anything."

"For the simple reason that I didn't know Ruth was there," said Stephen with dignity.

Tony told him what had happened. "She isn't a bad sort," he said somewhat doubtfully. "I suppose it will be all right."

"Mother doesn't like her," said Stephen shortly.

"How do you know? She didn't tell you so, I suppose."

"No, but I do know. You used not to like her yourself. I think you ought to have talked to Henry and not to her."

"Well, I've told you why I didn't. I might talk to him at the end of the term. I'll see how I get on."

"You'll get on all right, old boy."

"Why do you think so?"

"Oh, because it's only a question of working regularly, and you'll jolly well have to."

Tony laughed. "I'm funking it just a little," he said. "Still your mater has been so decent to me that I shall try to be a good boy. What happens if you do slack?"

"You don't. At least I don't. May as well do what you've got to do at the proper time."

"Are you glad that you haven't got to go fagging down to St. John's any longer? Henry said he thought your mater had given it up because she wanted us all to go to the same church."

"I dare say she did; but she doesn't tell me things like that."

Tony had never quite understood the terms on which Stephen stood with his mother. He looked at him now, his awkward form in a shrunken flannel shirt and trousers stretched at ease in his hammock, with the sun spots filtering through the thick leaves on to him. He was something of an enigma, old Stephen, who always seemed to blurt out everything that came into his mind, but had more reticences than most boys of his age. "Will she make you go into the Church if you don't want to?" he asked.

Stephen let down his long legs in the creased trousers too short for them. "I think we'd better go and have a single," he said. "Margaret and Ruth will nearly have finished by this time."

Tony had a spurt of irritation against him, aroused in part by the feeling that his own question had been impertinent. "You needn't get shirty," he said, as he

got out of the hammock. "I tell you everything about myself."

Stephen lingered. There was a blush on his face. "I'm not shirty," he said: "but that's a thing I don't want to talk about yet. I haven't made up my mind. When I do I'll tell you before anybody."

They moved on. Tony's sense of friendship was deepened. There was something about Stephen, with all his blundering openness, that had always been just beyond him, reserves that were no part of his own habit, and to be respected. If Stephen did disclose himself to him, it would be a signal mark of esteem. It was a sign of it that he had told him that it was his own decision that would guide him, in a matter in which he had seemed to be ready to give unthinking obedience. Tony seemed at that moment to be of lighter clay beside him. But all he said was "Right you are! I'll listen with all my ears."

"Asses' ears," giggled Stephen, reverting to his cruder self.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. BROADBENT

THE people with whom Tony lived in such close proximity as to get to know them better than others, were Mrs. Hawthorne, Ruth and Stephen, and Jessie, the elderly maid who had come with them from the London Vicarage and counted for more in the life of Ifield Cottage than the general run of servants. But he had not been for long an inmate of this family before he found that there was somebody else who counted in it. This was Mr. Hawthorne, who had been dead for so many years.

Tony had always been vaguely aware of him as a personality. There were photographs of him in every room, and in all of them his character and calling were slightly emphasized, as if the photographs had been taken to satisfy a wider demand than that of his family or of his immediate friends. He had died at the age of thirty-seven, but Tony had never thought of him as young. He had been known as a preacher, and he had written books—little books on various aspects of the Christian life, which were still widely read. Tony read one of them, when he had learnt somewhat to his surprise—for he had had no experience of such prohibitions—that secular reading was taboo on Sunday. There may have been some idea in his mind of propitiating or complimenting Mrs. Hawthorne by choosing this book to read, but he read it with genuine interest. It put religion in a new light to him, and he admired the man who had written it. “Your

father must have been a wonderful man," he said to Stephen, when they went upstairs together.

"Yes, rather!" said Stephen, as if that might be taken for granted. But Stephen had been only six when his father had died, and could tell Tony nothing very interesting, though he talked sometimes of what had been said or written about him. It was plain, however, that he had his father always before him as an example to be followed. Whether he had thought out what it would mean to follow him was beyond the range of Tony's perception, or interest. "We used to do that when my father was alive," was a sufficient reason with Stephen for accepting any rule that at his age he might have been expected to find irksome, and was put forward with an air of finality whenever Tony showed a disposition to kick against the pricks. But Tony was good about that. On the whole he accepted Stephen's reasoning. Mr. Hawthorne had been a very good man. There was no prohibition for the sake of prohibition in the teaching of his little books: he seemed to have gained happiness and peace of mind by following a certain path, and that was the path that it was sought to follow at Ifield Cottage. Tony was prepared to look upon it with indulgence, though his own unaccustomed feet sometimes found it rather stony.

The influences that were about him, and his sympathetic interest in their source, brought him to regard Mrs. Hawthorne in a more critical light than he would otherwise have turned upon her. To a boy of sixteen his elders of a generation older are not yet to be thought of as beings of like clay with himself; but where one of them reveals himself to his understanding in speech or writing there is some bridging of the gulf. Tony felt that he knew something about Mr. Hawthorne, and it

was interesting to apply what he knew to Mrs. Hawthorne, who seemed so immeasurably more remote.

Of course she was good. People of her age, who choose to be so, need have no trouble about that. But she did not seem to him to be good in the same way as her husband had been good. He compared her with Laura, to her advantage. Both of them professed more religion than others, but Laura's religion showed itself chiefly in dislike of the religion of others. Mrs. Hawthorne was not like that at all. Tony knew enough of such questions to be aware that the school to which her husband had belonged was sometimes in active opposition to the school to which Laura gave her adherence; but Mrs. Hawthorne never expressed herself against any form of religious belief. She never expressed herself about religion at all, and that was what he found odd in her, after reading some of her husband's books, and knowing that she founded her life upon a strict devotion to his memory.

She conducted family prayers night and morning, reading a long passage from the Bible and a long discursive prayer. On Sunday evenings, between tea-time and church-time, she read to them, usually from a book of missionary travel, which was sometimes interesting. She did not discourage discussion about it, but whatever discussion there was did not concern itself with the religious side of the book. Once when Tony asked a question about some point of doctrine which he did not understand, she answered him carefully, but shortly, and it seemed to him coldly, and Ruth and Stephen both looked at him as if he was breaking through an understanding.

He asked Stephen about it. He always wanted to talk about whatever interested him, and this matter of a religion that was part of your daily life was interesting

him at the moment. "Don't you talk to your mater about the things she was reading about this evening?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," said Stephen hurriedly, and added, "if I want to."

"Well, don't you want to sometimes? It all seems to me jolly interesting. Why did you and Ruth stare at me as if I'd talked out loud in church when I asked what justification meant?"

Stephen seemed to have no reply to that, and Tony pressed him. "I bet your father would have told me," he said, "and been glad I asked."

Stephen seized hold of this. "You needn't expect that sort of thing from the mater," he said. "You just ask questions to show what a clever good boy you are."

"That's scuttling away," retorted Tony. "And it isn't true either, and you know it isn't true. If you believe in it all, you ought to want to tell people about it. That's what your pater said in his book."

Stephen scratched a puzzled head. They were accustomed to use great freedom of speech to each other, and he did not readily take offence. "I know," he said; "but it's jolly hard."

Tony got a little way further with him. His impression deepened that Stephen had his mind engaged with questions that he was not yet ready to talk about; but he did not press his enquiries about Mrs. Hawthorne. Perhaps it was something of a puzzle to Stephen too that she seemed to keep a crust of reserve around what was apparently of supreme importance to her. She must have talked to him and Ruth about these things when they were children; indeed Tony knew that she had done so, for Ruth once showing him her little shelf of books, had turned over the pages of one and said, "These are

the pictures that mother taught us Bible stories from."

There came to the house, a week or two after Tony had gone to live there, the clergyman who had succeeded Mr. Hawthorne at St. John's. He was there when the boys got back from school, and stayed to tea. It crossed Tony's quick mind, observing him, that he was rather like a caricature of Mr. Hawthorne. His hair was brushed and his whiskers arranged in the same fashion. His face was fatter, but had the same sort of expression, only more unctuous. Tony did not like him, although he showed himself anxious to make friends; for he never knew what he was going to say next. He would have liked to talk to Mrs. Hawthorne about the new ideas that had come into his mind, if she had been willing, but he did not want to talk about them in public to a stranger. Mr. Blair seemed to take it for granted that all of them, even Ruth, and even Tony, had words at command to respond to his intimacies. The conversation did not flow freely. Mrs. Hawthorne maintained her usual self-collected reserve, and nothing could have been told from her manner of what she was thinking. Perhaps Mr. Blair had come to ask her why she had left off going to his church. Stephen thought he might have done so, but Tony was surprised to find that Stephen rather liked Mr. Blair. "He's a good preacher," he said, "much better than old Bland." Mr. Bland was the Vicar of Hilbury, wordy in his sermons, and dull.

"He made me feel awkward," Tony said. "He talked to me as if I was a parson myself."

"I know what you mean," said Stephen, "and I rather admire him for it."

"Admire him for it? Why?"

"Well, you don't suppose he liked talking like that,

with all of us sitting like stuck pigs and saying nothing."

"Then why on earth did he do it?"

"It's his job, isn't it?"

This was another new idea to Tony. "Did your pater talk like that?" he asked.

"Of course he did. Only he'd have been better at it. He wouldn't have made you feel awkward. You'd have liked it. I'm glad I'm old enough to remember how he used to talk to me. I used to sit on his knee, before I went to bed. It's rather beastly, isn't it?—that we should both have lost our paters."

"You've got your mater still," said Tony, after a pause. "I never knew mine."

Stephen did not shirk the implication this time. "The mater used to do it with Ruth when she was little," he said. "Ruth doesn't remember father—except just a very little. I don't think she really remembers him at all. You see, father was so much—well, *everything*, when he was alive, that I think the mater felt she could never take his place—with me, I mean. She's been awfully good, though."

"Oh, rather!" said Tony.

Not many people came to Ifield Cottage in a social way. Dr. Cookson sometimes looked in at tea-time. He was a widower, with one child who was Ruth's particular friend. He was fond of Ruth, and of Stephen too, and he soon took Tony into his embracing friendliness. He had a great flow of cheerful talk, and even Mrs. Hawthorne's stiffness melted before it, for he was not affected by her reserve, and talked to her with the same freedom as to anybody else. Margaret Cookson was quieter even than Ruth, and very shy. When her father came to fetch

her and sat there talking on and on, she kept her eyes on him all the time, and then her rather plain face became quite different. He would break off suddenly and say: "Come along, kiddy, it's time we went home," and she would jump up at once, as if she was glad to go with him.

Tony had heard it said, when he had mixed more with the world of Hilbury that he did now, that Dr. Cookson wanted to marry Miss Brightling, or perhaps that Miss Brightling wanted to marry Dr. Cookson—he couldn't quite remember which way it was. He wouldn't have brought that sort of gossip into Ifield Cottage, but, having it in his mind, he said to Ruth: "I wonder what Margaret would do if her father were to marry again."

Ruth surprised him by saying: "She thinks he will, because everybody likes him so."

"She doesn't want him to, I suppose?"

"Oh, no."

Ruth was always calm. You couldn't tell what she was thinking, unless it was about something quite on the surface, any more than you could tell with Mrs. Hawthorne; and you couldn't very well ask her.

Another occasional visitor to the cottage was Mr. Broadbent. He would come in about nine o'clock, when the boys finished their preparation, and the supper tray was brought in. Nothing extra was provided for him. He was popularly supposed to drink a bottle of port every night—the figure was gradually rising to two—and other liquors besides, and to have been helped to bed on occasions by his housekeeper. Whatever foundations these rumours were based upon, he drank nothing but weak tea at Mrs. Hawthorne's, and ate bread and butter, if he ate anything.

Tony was agreeably excited on the first evening that

he came. Mr. Broadbent had never taken any notice of him out of school, and had confined his notice in school strictly to scholastic matters. But now he was a member of a family with whom Mr. Broadbent was on familiar terms. He would see him in a new and interesting light, and would be seen in a new, and he hoped interesting, light himself.

During the consumption of tea and bread and butter, Mr. Broadbent talked about the Lake Country, where he had spent his holidays, and it appeared that he had first visited that country twenty-five years before with a reading party, of which Mr. Hawthorne had been a member. He alluded to him once or twice, calling him by his Christian name. Stephen had not prepared Tony for this degree of intimacy. Mr. Broadbent did appear in a new light. He spoke in his ordinary stiff staccato, but there was a quality in his voice that Tony had not heard before. He seemed to fit in to the simple domesticity of the scene in a way that could hardly have been imagined.

He offered to read some Wordsworth. It seemed that he liked to spend an occasional evening at Ifield Cottage, reading aloud, and Stephen had never mentioned this either.

Mr. Broadbent had shaken hands with Tony on his arrival, and his little bloodshot eyes had rested upon him with a glare that might either have been maleficent or friendly. After that he had not addressed him, though he had once brought Stephen into the conversation. But now when the tray had been taken away and he took out the book from a shelf by the fire-place, he said to Tony, with what was undoubtedly a smile, "I believe you like poetry, Dare. Stephen doesn't, and if he would like to look at a book with steam-engines in it, while I'm read-

ing, I've no objection, as long as he doesn't turn over too many pages."

But Mrs. Hawthorne said: "I think Stephen will like to listen. His father was a great lover of Wordsworth's poetry." And Stephen, sitting at the table, with his hands in his pockets, shuffled his body and poked his head forward and said: "Oh, yes, I like it too."

It seemed that Mr. Broadbent had read the first book of "The Excursion" on a previous occasion, and now proposed to read the second. He settled himself and began, pitching his inflexible voice in a key rather higher than was natural to him. At the first words Tony threw a look at Stephen, who was sitting hunched up in his chair in an attitude of patient endurance. But Stephen did not meet his look. It was not until the reading was well under way that he seemed to awake to a sense of the words having any particular meaning. Then Tony, whose thoughts had begun to wander, saw his head go to one side, rather in the manner of a terrier's who has caught the sound of something that may interest him. Mr. Broadbent was reading, with no difference in the inflection of his voice:

"The fowl domestic, and the household dog—
In his capacious mind he loved them all."

In a moment Tony would have met Stephen's eye; but fortunately for them both he met Mrs. Hawthorne's first. She happened to be looking up, and looked down again immediately, with no sign of noticing anything. Tony was saved from a fit of suppressed laughter which could only have resulted in disgrace. He grew hot all over, and his sense of humour was shocked out of him for the moment.

After that he listened with half an ear which left his thoughts free to roam. They hung about the little home-like room, snug and bright, in which he was sitting. A sense of something significant in the scene, something of which he could not quite catch the meaning, grew upon him. All the inanimate things in the room seemed to share in it, the two little piles of books in front of him and Stephen, sitting at the round table with the green cloth on it; the heavy marble clock on the mantelpiece, and the bronze figures on either side of it; the crimson patterned paper on the walls, and the dark paintings in heavy frames; Mrs. Hawthorne's work-table, with its basket heaped with rolled stockings; the long sofa with its scrolled end upon which she sat alone; the brass gas-brackets on either side of the mantelpiece, only one of which was lit; the heavy curtains over the window; the recessed bookcase with the cupboard beneath it behind Mr. Broadbent's chair; the mahogany sideboard with silver on it, and the big Bible and prayer-book; the glowing coals in the fireplace, which made the room a little too hot, even for a cold winter night.

What did it all mean? Something different from the larger though not dissimilar room at Merstead Rectory in which he had spent companionable evenings with his aunt and his grandfather; more than the room in which he had sat with his father at Ifield Lodge. A longing came over him as the vision of those rooms came to him, but his interest in this one remained.

Mrs. Hawthorne sat upright in her corner of the sofa, her thin well-shaped hands drawing the eye as they dealt with her work. She was dressed in the neat black and white which most widows of her class wore at that time, though not all for so long as she had worn it. There was no grey in the dark smooth hair that could be seen

outside the cap with its lawn streamers. Her face was composed, but not severe. Tony was a little surprised, looking at her, to find that his impression of Mrs. Hawthorne's severity had largely disappeared, during the few weeks he had lived with her. She laid down limits, but within them there was as much liberty as could be desired. There was sometimes an uneasy sense in him that he might not always find it easy to keep within her limits, and he was certainly afraid of what might happen if his will came into contact with hers. It would have been painful if she had caught him laughing just now. She had impressed herself upon him, but he was beginning to have a feeling slightly filial towards her. She was the mother of her family.

He saw dimly to-night that she was still a good-looking woman, when he had thought of her only as beyond the age when women could be called good-looking. Her skin was smooth and her features well-formed; she had a slim straight figure and held herself well. His eyes strayed to the portrait of Mr. Hawthorne over the mantelpiece, and he caught at something that was floating about at the back of his mind, undefined. The pair of them might have been sitting together in this room, with their children about them. He suddenly felt very sorry for Mrs. Hawthorne, as well as for Stephen, who had said that he missed his father.

But it was not an impression of loss that was affecting his mind. His eyes turned to Mr. Broadbent, sitting by the side of the fire reading in his high thin voice, on and on. With his short sturdy figure and bearded face he seemed far older than Mr. Hawthorne would have been if he had lived. It was difficult to think of him as having ever been young, and though one might have accepted the fact of a middle-aged wife for him, it seemed more

natural that he should never have had one. Yet in some strange way he belonged, and heightened the impression that Tony was trying to capture and define.

He got no farther than a feeling of pleasure in the fact of this fireside reading in the warm shelter of a home, which kept him quiet and contented, though he was not bothering himself to pay much attention to what was being read. But when it had gone on for nearly three-quarters of an hour, with only one pause, in which Mr. Broadbent drank off a cup of cold tea which he had kept standing by his elbow, his ear was caught, and his mind lit up.

“Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,
With alabaster domes, and silver spires,
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high
Uplifted; here, serene pavilions bright,
In avenues disposed; there, towers begirt
With battlements that on their restless fronts
Bore stars—illumination of all gems!”

Ah! that was poetry! He had had no idea that Wordsworth was like that. Good old Broadbeans! He did know. There was even a faint change in his voice as he read these lines and those that followed them. Tony wished he had listened more carefully to what had led up to that splendid passage. But it seemed that the long reading was coming to an end now. Stephen kicked him under the table at the words, “So ends my dolorous tale, and glad I am That it is ended,” and he was mildly annoyed. When Mr. Broadbent finished and laid down his book, he said: “Oh, thank you, sir; that’s lovely.”

Stephen snorted under his breath. Tony knew that he was accusing him of affecting enthusiasm for the sake

of the impression it would make, and was profoundly irritated. "It was the bit about the sky after the storm," he said, half sulkily. Hang it! he *had* been moved by it. If he was going to be criticized for an expression of pleasure he would defend himself.

Mr. Broadbent looked at him with a quizzical smile. "You and Stephen must fight it out between you," he said.

Had he heard Stephen's ill-intentioned exhalation? Tony did not stay to enquire. His annoyance broke bounds. "What's the good of sitting and listening for an hour if you're not allowed to like it?" he said.

The words were addressed to Stephen, but in the way in which they were spoken might have been a challenge to his elders. Stephen looked startled and apologetic, with a glance at his mother, who frowned slightly and would have spoken; but Mr. Broadbent said, without raising his voice: "You're quite right, Dare. I expected you to go to sleep for most of it; but I should have been disappointed if you hadn't woken up when you did."

This relieved the tension. Mrs. Hawthorne said: "It's time you and Stephen went to bed, Tony," and he was glad to get up and go.

Mr. Broadbent was standing in front of the fire. He shook hands with Tony, and said: "I'm glad you like Wordsworth." In the disturbance of his mind Tony knew at least that old Broadbeans had taken no offence at his outburst.

But Stephen should have it. He was getting fed up with Stephen.

Stephen didn't come up immediately, and Tony's anger against him deepened, as he flung off his clothes. Irritation had grown up between them of late; they had

been too continually and too closely together. A row was wanted to clear the air; and there was going to be a row.

Stephen came up whistling—that horrible tune, “Two lovely bright eyes,” horrible at least in the silly way in which he was eternally singing or whistling it. He left off as he came into the room, and said in his goggling way: “I say, fancy you letting out at old Broadbeans like that! Jolly decent of him not to give you two hundred lines—with stops *and* accents.”

The last words were said in absurd imitation. Stephen was always trying to imitate somebody; it was one of his silly maddening tricks. Tony wriggled through the nightshirt he was putting on and burst out at him. “It was *you*, you fool! Always sneering and giggling and playing the fool! I’m fed up with it. I’ve a jolly good mind to punch your head.”

Stephen stopped short in utter surprise. Apparently the irritation wasn’t as great on his side as on Tony’s. But it wasn’t altogether absent. His face darkened. “You can try it if you like,” he said. “But I’m hanged if I know what you’re shirty about now. It’s always something. I thought it would be jolly living together, but—”

“You wish I hadn’t come, I suppose. So do I. But that’s a jolly thing to hear from you!”

“Oh, of course, you may say it and I mustn’t. Still, I don’t mean it. It was jolly enough at first.”

“And only just now I was thinking how jolly it was downstairs, and then of course you must come in, in your beastly disagreeable way—always trying to make me out as if I was sucking-up, whatever I say or do.”

“Well, you do suck up. I’m not going to say you

don't. Still, if that's what you're so shirty about, the mater said just now I oughtn't to have done it. I apologize. So there."

He began to undress.

"Fat lot of apology that is!" said Tony, getting into bed.

There was silence for a time. Stephen finished undressing, and after a moment's hesitation knelt down by his bed. This seemed to Tony to be taking an unfair advantage.

Stephen did not remain long on his knees. When he got up he said, with his silly grin: "Let not the sun go down on your wrath."

Tony was infinitely disgusted. He hadn't been brought up to religious behaviour in the way Stephen had, but he was hanged if he would make fun of the Bible in that way. He told Stephen so.

Stephen's face grew serious. "I wasn't," he said. "I'm sorry I upset you."

Oh, so he was going to be meek and Christian! Tony wasn't going to stand that either. "Then don't do it again," he said.

Nothing more was said until Mrs. Hawthorne came up to them, which was a little later than usual. Tony, a large part of whose annoyance had disappeared, though he could not have told why, as he had not said half he had intended to say to Stephen, was almost asleep when he heard the front door open and Mr. Broadbent's "good-night" to Mrs. Hawthorne. Now he would have to begin it all over again, and he didn't want to. Should he pretend to be asleep?

Mrs. Hawthorne came in quietly, carrying her candle, and looked from one to the other of them as if she were not sure whether they would be awake. She did not

speak, but bent down to kiss Stephen, who flung his arm round her neck. "Good-night, mother dear," he said.

Tony opened his eyes at that. She came to his bed and bent down to kiss him too. It was the first time she had done so. He wished he could have thrown his arm round her neck as Stephen had done. "Good-night, Tony," she said, and left them.

CHAPTER XIX

HALF-TERM

TONY spent his half-term holiday with Henry and Laura, calling for Henry in the City as before, and travelling down to Estbridge with him on Friday evening. But now it was dark and cold, and he had no very pleasurable anticipations to keep him company, as Henry read his paper, and he sat thinking.

There was nothing in particular to account for his depressed mood. Half the term was over, and he had worked well and gone up several places in his Form; but the excitement of the new start was over, and the unremitting effort required of him, if he were to do what he wanted to do, was weighing upon him. Perhaps he would feel better about it after this break of a few days; but it wouldn't be much of a holiday—nothing like the fun it had been not to have to go to school for three days from Ifield Lodge.

He and Stephen had got along well together since their quarrel a few weeks before. He liked old Stephen better than ever, and it was easy enough to laugh at some of his silly ways, instead of getting annoyed at them. He liked Mrs. Hawthorne too. He knew her now, more intimately that he would have thought it possible to know her. She was always the same—kind enough if you kept her rules, but allowing no departure from them. It was not possible to attract her interest by any arts of self-recommendation, and he had given up trying to do that

altogether; but her interests could be aroused by some, though by no means all, of the things that interested him; and to talk to her was not always a matter of mere deference to an older person. Ruth was always the same too; she had some stirrings of literary and artistic taste, not very marked as yet, but enough to give her and Tony something to talk about sometimes, which he couldn't talk about to Stephen, who was little interested in such matters. Really there was nothing to grumble at in his life at Ifield Cottage. He had found his niche there; with each of his constant companions there was some special point of contact. He was not sure that he wouldn't rather have spent his holiday there than with Laura and Henry. But there wasn't much pleasure in life anywhere nowadays, and not much to look forward to either.

He had had a letter from his aunt a few days before, with the unexpected news that his grandfather was resigning his living. They were preparing for departure already, and would have left Merstead before Christmas. They were going to a warmer place for the winter—either Bournemouth or St. Leonards, she thought. She hoped that Tony would be able to come to them there for the Christmas holidays, or for part of them; but she could not be quite certain about it yet, as their plans were not formed.

So the life of Merstead had come to an end, as well as the life of Ifield Lodge. That was a depressing thought, though it would have been worse if the break had come before the summer holidays. It might be more amusing to spend his Christmas holidays in a seaside town than at Merstead. He did not want to think too much of Merstead being taken out of his life altogether. It was only part of the general dullness and deadness that had come

to him, and seemed to be weighing on him particularly just now.

He told Henry this news when he folded up his paper and showed himself ready for a little conversation. But Henry knew it already. "She wrote to me," he said. "Did she say anything about Mr. Barrett having been ill? She didn't give me any reason for his resigning. It's rather sudden, isn't it?"

"She said he wanted to be in a warmer place. I suppose they had to decide in a hurry, or he'd have had to stay there for this winter."

"Yes, I dare say that's it. Of course he's getting old, but I shouldn't have said he was past his work yet—not in a parish like that. She's a plucky woman, Miss Barrett. Did she tell you she was going to furnish a house and let lodgings?"

She had not told Tony that, and the idea of it gave him a disagreeable shock.

"They wouldn't have enough to live on," Henry said. "She said that she had always made up her mind to take a post as matron of a school or something of that sort when she was left alone, but as there'd be the two of them she thought this would be the best way. I think she's right, and Laura thinks so too."

"Why did she write to you about it?"

"I'm glad she did. Father always managed their little affairs for them—when they wanted any managing. She wanted some advice on various points. She has a good business head, and knows how to manage. I should think she'd do very well. They'd take a house big enough to be able to live in it comfortably themselves. Of course they'll have something outside."

"She told me they were going to Bournemouth or St. Leonards."

"I advised her to try St. Leonards. Houses are cheaper there. I said I'd look out for one for her. I've written to Aunt Charlotte already, and asked her to see the agents. She'll like getting busy about it."

Henry's Aunt Charlotte busying herself about finding a house for Tony's Aunt Bertha to let lodgings in! There was not much left of Tony's sense of the superiority of his side of the family over Henry's. Still, Aunt Bertha was Aunt Bertha. Whatever she did, she'd probably be superior to Aunt Charlotte. If she was ready to keep his grandfather and herself in that way, she was to be admired for it, as Henry had said. Henry had meant it too. Whatever Henry was, he wasn't a snob. Tony was afraid that he was a bit of a snob himself; and he was sure that Laura was. This would be something for Laura to crow over him about. She wouldn't do it openly, but she would be all the more irritating; for her intention would be plain enough.

His feeling about Laura had reverted to something of what it had always been. She hadn't written to him since he had seen her last. She didn't really take any interest in him, and he wondered why she had taken the trouble to make herself decent to him when he had stayed with her at the end of the holidays. It was she who had stopped his going to the Hopwoods. He knew that now for certain. If she pretended again, he wouldn't give in to her pretence. He had been a fool to trust her, and if he wanted to talk to Henry about going to Oxford he was going to do it. But he didn't want to raise that question at all yet. It was too far ahead, and he was not sure that he was so keen about it as he had been. He hardly seemed to have it in him to be keen about anything now, and he certainly wasn't keen about the days immediately in front of him at Acacia Villas.

It was pouring with rain, but Tony had his Gladstone bag and his hat-box. They drove from the station in a musty-smelling fly along the dull little streets to Henry's dull little house. How beastly it all was! What on earth was he going to do with himself there for three days.

Laura was waiting at the door for them. She was in a low-necked gown—the first that Tony had ever seen her in. The house was bright and warm anyhow, after the cold and wet, and Laura's welcome seemed warm too, though that was probably an illusion. "You must hurry up and dress," she said. "I've ordered dinner at half-past six, so that Ellen can clear away and go too."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Henry. "There's a performance of 'Dorothy' at the Town Hall. We thought you'd like to go."

"Well, that would be something amusing at any rate. But I can't dress," said Tony. "I haven't got any clothes."

He was rather glad of the opportunity of mentioning this. The school concert loomed ahead, and he wanted to be properly dressed for that, but didn't know whether Henry would think it necessary.

"I thought you might wear an old suit of Henry's," said Laura. "I've laid it out for you. He's hardly ever worn it, but it never fitted very well, and I've made him get a new one. If it's nearly right for you, you can have it altered."

Henry's old clothes! It had come to that. And it had always seemed natural to Tony that he should be so much better dressed than Henry, who didn't care about clothes, and had been niggardly in buying them.

But the suit laid out on his bed seemed almost new,

and was made by the good City tailor who had made his father's clothes and his own best ones. And, most surprisingly, there was a new shirt and collar and a white tie and a pair of silk socks, laid out by the side of the suit, and a piece of paper with "A present from Laura" written on it. What did it all mean? Had this leopard really changed her spots? And if so, why?

A fire was burning cheerfully in the room. Tony hadn't been allowed a fire in his bedroom even at Ifield Lodge, and such a thing was impossible to imagine in his and Stephen's room at Ifield Cottage, which was the coldest room he had ever inhabited. His sybaritic taste jumped to the comfort of it. If Laura was going to treat him like that he wouldn't have such a bad holiday after all. Living at Ifield Cottage was certainly rather Spartan; it would be something to be in the lap of warmth and comfort during the next few days, and to have a room to himself. He rather liked Stephen's companionship, but a change would be pleasant.

The suit fitted better than he would have expected, and he was pleased with his appearance in it. When he went downstairs he kissed Laura, with less distaste than he had ever felt for that formality, indeed with no distaste at all. "It's awfully decent of you," he said. "I was rather worrying about the School concert. Now I shall look as smart as any of 'em."

"We want you to do us credit," she said. "I think it fits pretty well. Henry thought you could take it to the tailor's when you go up on Monday, if anything wants altering. Really, I think you look better in this suit than Henry does in his new one."

Tony was also of that opinion. Henry never wore his clothes as if they mattered at all. Tony had had the

same impression about Laura, and hers; but really, to-night she looked quite nice, and younger than he had ever thought of her being.

They had taken to dinner, it appeared, instead of high tea, which would have been a more suitable meal at that hour. In several respects there had been a stringing up of their way of living, even since Tony had been there last. It must have been Laura who had wanted the alterations. Henry was exactly the same as he had always been, but Laura had certainly altered. There was more of an air about her, which showed itself not only in her dress. It seemed to Tony that the improvement in her was genuine. She really did seem anxious that he should enjoy himself with them. She had taken seats for a *matinée* the next afternoon; he wasn't to get up till he wanted to in the morning. "I expect you have enough of getting up early at Ifield Cottage," she said. "I want this to be a real holiday to you."

Tony's spirits rose. He chattered away as he had never thought to do with Henry and Laura, and she encouraged him, though once or twice Henry showed some slight disapproval of his sallies. Tony had to remind himself that he had a bone to pick with Laura—about the Hopwoods. But he would wait until she reverted to something of her old way of behaving towards him—if she did. As long as she remained in this accommodating mood he didn't want to disturb the waters.

Towards the end of dinner Henry said: "We may be coming up to Hilbury next Saturday. Perhaps, after all, we may take a house there. At any rate we're going to have a look round."

"I don't think it's in the least likely we shall," Laura said, "but—"

"How changeable you are!" Henry interrupted her, but not without indulgence. "You were all for it a few days ago."

Laura's face assumed an expression that Tony recognized as one of suppressed annoyance. She had a variety of such expressions, but he had seldom seen them called up by a speech of Henry's. It cleared, however, and she said sweetly: "Oh, you mustn't blame me for any change of mind over house-hunting." She turned to Tony. "I've got it on the brain," she said. "I spend hours a day over House Agents' advertisements. We may as well look over houses in Hilbury as anywhere."

She changed the conversation then, but was ready to talk it over with Tony when they were alone together the next morning.

The rain was lashing the window-panes, and heightened the comfort of Laura's drawing-room, where Tony reclined in the depths of an easy-chair in front of the fire, while she sat in another, less cavernous, with her needlework. Tony had given himself over to the enjoyment of what was evidently intended to be a holiday as agreeable as Laura could make it for him. The musical play the night before had enchanted him, and Laura had the score, out of which he had been picking tunes on the piano until she had come to settle herself in the room. She had sent him up his breakfast, and he had not got up until after Henry had departed for the City, when he had soaked himself in a hot bath, and come downstairs most pleasantly relaxed in body, and also in mind. There was the expedition to London to be looked forward to, and in the meantime it was enough to sit lazily in front of the fire and talk to Laura, who was now so ready to be talked to.

"Is there really any chance of your taking a house in

Hilbury?" he asked her. "It would be rather jolly. I should be able to see more of you."

It struck him as he made it that this was an odd speech from him to Laura, and he smiled to himself. Perhaps he had only half meant it; but if Laura were to continue to be as decent to him as she was now he wouldn't mind having them near.

"I think Henry would like it," she said. "He has friends there, and we shouldn't have to begin all over again as we should if he went to a new place altogether. We have a few friends here, but the neighbourhood is going down, and they are gradually moving away. We have quite decided not to take another house at Est-bridge."

"I suppose Hilbury is one of the nicest suburbs there is," said Tony. "Why didn't you take a house there first of all?"

"Well, partly because my mother was alive then, and lived here, and I wanted to be near her. But it was partly because we had to begin in a very small way, and go on with it as long as Mr. Dare was alive; and it was easier not to be among people who might have expected more of us than we could do."

A memory crossed Tony's mind. "Henry told me," he said, "that Ifield Lodge cost such a lot to keep up that you didn't have as much to live on as you ought to have had."

She did not reply for a moment, and during that moment Tony remembered more of what Henry had told him. It flashed upon him that Laura's reply would be significant.

"I don't know why Henry told you that," she said, with a shade of stiffness. "I never grumbled at not having more to spend."

He liked her for that. Any other answer would have reflected on his father, or at least shown that she wished to take credit for a sacrifice. The quick generosity of his mind prompted him to say: "I'm afraid I was beastly to you sometimes at Ifield Lodge. I've often been sorry for it since."

"We didn't understand one another very well," she said, "but you've so much improved since then."

"So have you," said Tony with a laugh. "Prosperity suits you."

He hardly knew why he said that, but directly he had said it, it seemed to him to explain everything about Laura, and especially her changed attitude towards him. "You didn't have much chance of being kind to me before, but now you like it," he said.

"Of course it gives one more happiness," said Laura with beautiful meekness, "to think for other people rather than always for oneself."

This put Tony on an equality with her again. "Yes, of course, that's understood," he said; "but you do like being prosperous, don't you? You wouldn't have acknowledged it a year ago, but you've so improved that you can afford to tell the truth now."

She smiled. "You're very pressing," she said. "Supposing we did settle down in Hilbury, it would be more amusing for you. Mrs. Hawthorne doesn't go out much, apparently; but when we got to know people you could go with us sometimes."

"What, in term-time?"

"You used to go out a lot in term-time—much too much, I think. Still, I do think that Mrs. Hawthorne overdoes it rather—in being *too* strict, I mean."

"She lets us go out to tea on half-holidays. Mrs.

Hopwood wrote to her to ask if I could go to the Grange last Saturday."

"And wouldn't she let you?"

"She would have let me if you hadn't said that I wasn't to go there at all."

There! How would she meet that? He no longer felt resentful against her, but it didn't seem necessary to wait until he did to tackle her. If he kept up the right attitude, he felt now that he could manipulate her.

"Did she tell you that?" exclaimed Laura, dropping her work and looking at him with her eyebrows raised.

But she didn't do it quite well enough. Tony laughed at her. "Why did you tell her I wasn't to go there?" he asked. "They were my greatest friends. Father didn't know them, but he never minded my going there, and Mrs. Hawthorne wouldn't have minded either, though of course she wouldn't have let me go as often as I used to."

"Did she tell Mrs. Hopwood that we had said you weren't to go there?"

"We! Did Henry object too? I don't believe he did. I shall ask him." He was feeling much at his ease with her now.

"Both Henry and I thought that you had gone out by yourself a great deal too much, and we thought it better to make a rule—or to ask Mrs. Hawthorne to make a rule—that you shouldn't go to—that you should only go to friends of father's. I *may* have mentioned the Hopwoods by name, because—"

"Oh, you did. There's no doubt about that."

"Well, if I did it was because you used to spend such a lot of time there when you ought to have been working. I certainly didn't intend to single them out—I shouldn't like Mrs. Hopwood to think—"

"No, I don't suppose you would. If you come to live at Hilbury you'll get more fun out of knowing them than anybody. I must say I think it was rather a poor trick, Laura. Of course you did have your knife into me, even after father died. However, as you've improved so—I think you might write to Mrs. Hawthorne and tell her that I can go there if they ask me again. If I do, I'll crack you up to them, and Mrs. Hopwood will be sure to call on you when you go to Hilbury."

"Oh, my dear Tony, you're talking nonsense. I think it's extremely unlikely that we shall go to Hilbury at all, and I certainly shouldn't put myself out about Mrs. Hopwood, or any other lady, just because she happened to live in a big house."

He laughed at that. He wouldn't now have thought of attributing to Mrs. Hawthorne any inclinations in that direction, but he was quite sure that Laura had them, and her very disclaimer cried it aloud. He thought he saw through her now. He had the entrée to several houses in Hilbury that she wouldn't have got into in the ordinary way. Of course, it was worth her while to be on terms with him on that account. The idea flattered his vanity, which had had little to feed on of late. It did not occur to him that all the improvement in their relations was due to her waking up to what he could do for her. For one thing, it had begun before she had had any idea of going to Hilbury. Still, it gave him a handle over her. "Do you want me to live with you and Henry when you go to Hilbury?" he asked.

She gathered up her work. "You're in a very foolish mood," she said. "If it meant having you to live with us, I shouldn't think of going to Hilbury. I think it's time we got ready."

CHAPTER XX

ST. LEONARDS

TONY did not see his aunt and his grandfather until he went to St. Leonards to spend his Christmas holidays with them. They went straight there from Norfolk, about the beginning of December, took rooms until Miss Barrett had found a suitable house, and then moved into it with as little fuss as possible. When Tony arrived they might have been settled there for years. There were no visitors yet; they would have Christmas to themselves as they had always had it, except that his father would not be there.

Miss Barrett had taken a large house on the Marina. The old Rector, who was getting a trifle infirm, slept in the back room, which was furnished partly as a sitting-room for him; but most of his books were in the sunny front room, which was the general sitting-room. They had their meals in a room in the basement, which was the only reminder that it was a lodging-house. But it was a good room, which the general run of lodging-house keepers would have used as their only sitting-room. The drawing-room floor, and the one above it were to be let, and there was a third floor, and attics above that.

The house was well furnished. Miss Barrett, showing Tony over it, told him that she had set aside a certain sum with which to add to the furniture that they had brought from Merstead, and had enjoyed picking up bargains, all of which she pointed out to him. "Furniture and pictures and ornaments were easy enough," she said, "and the landlord provided a sum for decorations—not

a very large sum, and I had some difficulty in keeping within it, but made up my mind that I would. It was carpets and curtains that I had such difficulty about. They are dull things to buy unless you have plenty of money to spend on them. However, I think I've done pretty well, don't you? They were all second hand, but don't look lodging-housey—at least I hope they don't. Blankets and linen had to be bought new, of course, and they ran away with a terrible lot of money. Beds too. I simply had to have the best mattresses. Anybody who takes these rooms will be as comfortable in that way as if they were at home—I don't care where they come from—and I don't think they can grumble at the furnishing of their rooms, do you? I don't claim that they are richly furnished because they're not. But there's a home atmosphere about them. They are not like the ordinary lodging-house rooms."

Tony laughed at the idea, but his private opinion was that they were exactly like the rooms that you would have expected to find in a private lodging-house of this sort. The shabbiness that had not seemed to matter at all in the old Rectory was emphasized in these large rooms with their new wall-papers, not of the most artistic quality: and Miss Barrett's purchases of odds and ends of furniture, vases and pots and ornaments, and indiscriminate pictures, did little more than fill up space that would better have been left bare. Their own sitting-room, with its well-filled bookcases, was the most attractive of them, though, or perhaps because, it contained only what was necessary for use. Aunt Bertha, as he had always known if he had cared to think about it, had little taste; but she had a great capacity for management. If the people who took her rooms would be no better off than in other seaside rooms in what would

satisfy the æsthetic sense, they would probably be a good deal better off in the things that would make for their comfort.

Tony and his aunt stood by one of the three tall windows of the drawing-room, from which the winter sea could be seen, and heard, tumbling its heavy waves on the shingle. Tony had an impulse of affection towards his aunt, who presented such a brave front to the world. He felt happy too. The holidays would be pleasant enough in this big house by the sea, with plenty to amuse himself with outside.

"This is a great change for you, Aunt Bertha," he said. "Do you mind it?"

She laughed at him. "No, I like it," she said. "I shall be busy enough, and I don't think there'll be much doubt about my getting enough people to make it pay. I shan't make a fortune at it. Our keeping the lower floor to ourselves will make a lot of difference. But if we can pay our way, that's all I want. I'm glad we made the change when we did. It is less of a break than if I had waited; and then I doubt if I should have thought of doing this."

"Does grandfather like it?"

"Oh, yes. He likes having people about him, after being in the country all his life. He's better off here in the winter, at any rate, and we needn't look too far forward."

"I suppose you decided rather suddenly, so as to begin here with the winter."

She did not answer him immediately. "Haven't you heard any Merstead news from Nanny?" she asked.

"No. She hardly ever writes. She hardly can, you know, and doesn't like me to know it. But what Merstead news?"

"Well, I suppose I'd better tell you. We didn't think we could go on there any longer. Sir James is going to be married."

"Sir James—married! Why he must be over eighty."

"He is nearly eighty. He is going to marry Alice Cutting."

Tony could only stare at her. Such a thing was beyond the range of his experience, or understanding.

"It was a shock to us," she went on in her level voice. "I don't want to say anything against him personally, but— Oh, well I won't say anything against him. It's the Cuttings I'm disappointed in; not only them but almost everybody in the parish. I've had to do with the people for over forty years, and thought I knew them. But the way they've taken this! I should think even old Nanny would think it was a great honour for Alice, and wouldn't see anything else in it. I didn't feel that I could go on among them any longer. Your grandfather said very little, but I could see how much it had upset him. When I suggested that he should resign I found that he wanted to, but hadn't thought that *I* should. Really, they're hardly better than heathen, any of them."

"But, Alice! How could she?"

"Oh—well—with everybody thinking it was such a wonderful chance for her! And to live in a great house and be called 'my lady!' She's no different from the rest of them. Ah, there's grandfather coming back from his walk. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes. You'd better go and get ready, Tony. Don't say anything to grandfather about it. We hardly ever talk about Merstead now. Just come down and say how do you do to him. The dear old man! He's so well here and enjoys his walks; but I'm always a little nervous about him

crossing roads. Ah, now he's safely over. Let's go down and let him in."

It took Tony a long time to get used to the disturbing revelation made to him. It opened to him ideas from which he shrank, for, though precocious in some ways, he was scarcely even adolescent in others. It was distasteful to him to think of that old man—actually older than his grandfather, marrying, or thinking of marrying a young girl. And Alice! He had been on the eve of making love to her himself. He was brought into it, in a way that bewildered him. He was forced, against any ideas that would have come to him unbidden, to the conclusion that Sir James's anger with him, which he had thought that of a too particular old man discovering a boy in fault, had been owing to his jealousy. He had wanted Alice for himself. How horrid and beastly it all was!

But how could she? Every vestige of his light fancy for her had been swept away. There was something distasteful about the thought of her now, as well as of Sir James. But he remembered how moved she had been towards him; and though he had not worried himself about how she might have been feeling after the sudden severance between them he did not suppose that he had become quite indifferent to her. Or if he had, that it was possible that she should have put Sir James in his place. Yet she was going to marry him. Oh, but not with any feeling of love towards him. Tony instinctively battled against the thought of himself and that old man having any relationship in common.

Yet, in spite of the taint that seemed to lie over the whole affair, and the distress it brought to him, there was undoubtedly mixed up in his thoughts some feeling

of self-importance about it. He debated with himself whether he would write to Alice and wish her well—as a friend, of her family and of herself. He did not do it, but he wrote to Nanny, a letter not in all respects sincere, and found himself looking forward with some eagerness to her answer.

It came about Christmas time, carrying her little present to him, and her loving wishes. It had evidently been written by a more scholarly hand than hers, but probably faithfully to her dictation.

“I showed your letter to Alice, who come here and asked after you. She send her love as she may do now and say Sir James is very kind to her and better so than poor and working all her life.”

That was all about what must have been exercising the minds of the parishioners of Merstead to the exclusion of most other matters. There was an allusion to the new Rector, whom these cautious folk were not prepared to accept as an adequate substitute for the old one until he should be better known, and the rest was the expression of her affection for Tony, and her sadness at the small prospect of seeing him again, old as she was. He was disappointed at not hearing more of what he wanted to hear, but reproached himself for his hardness of heart. Poor old Nanny! She did love him, and he loved her, but hadn't thought much about her in the regrets that sometimes came over him at having Merstead taken out of his life. Perhaps he would go there again some day—in those times that were coming, when he should be free to go where he liked. One of the first holidays he would have when he could choose his own holidays would be a cruise on the Broads; and perhaps the Hopwoods would ask him to go with them if they went there next summer.

He wrote to Nanny, holding out this prospect for her consolation, and was relieved of some of his self-reproach; and he did not mention Alice in this letter.

His aunt had told him not to open up the subject with his grandfather, but the old man talked about it when Tony accompanied him on his afternoon walk, which was always along the front. "I'm never tired of it," he said. "Perhaps in the summer I shall miss the trees and the fields, but that's a long way off yet. For the winter this is just what I like. How grand the sea is, and always changing! And whatever sun there is, we get it. You know, Tony, that Hastings has more sun in the winter than any other place in England. That's not generally known, but it is so. If the wind is too strong there are these shelters, which you can see are so ingeniously contrived that you can always find a seat in which you are protected from the wind altogether—at least if it isn't already full of people looking for the same thing as you are yourself. Why, the other morning, when a regular gale was blowing, and the waves were actually breaking over the parade at the other end, I sat for an hour in this very shelter that we're coming to, and read, without feeling it at all. Oh, it's just the place for me, Tony. I like to see the people too. You don't see enough of your fellow-men when you live buried in the country; and those that you do see—well, you can't help being disappointed in them sometimes."

He sighed, but did not make further reference to Merstead then. He was full of the satisfactions of his new life, and Tony saw them with his eyes, and felt something remotely resembling envy of him, in spite of his age, and his life so soon to close. "Aunt Bertha is glad of the change too, isn't she?" he said.

"Yes, I think so; I think so, Tony. It was the only

thing that troubled me a little. If we had been able to have a little house of our own here, I should have had no doubt about it; but we couldn't have managed that. We shall see how it turns out. There are some people who think it is a come-down for us, but your Aunt Bertha doesn't see it in that way, and why should I? I don't at all. In some ways I shall be more independent than I have ever been. The Rector of a parish is a good deal at the disposal of other people; it is what he is there for, of course, and he mustn't mind that. But he is always liable to find himself at loggerheads with somebody over some point in which he thinks it right to stand firm. I shall be spared all that here, and I hope still to be able to do some useful work, when I have felt my feet a little."

The sun was shining, brilliantly for a mid-winter English afternoon, and the salty wind was not too cold for a brisk walk. The old man stepped it out at a faster pace than when Tony had accompanied him on his walks at Merstead. They walked to the Hastings end of the parade, and sat for a time in one of the renowned shelters before returning.

The leeward side was away from the sea, and Tony enjoyed watching the people who were walking or driving. In those days St. Leonards was the haunt of well-to-do elderly people, a surprising number of whom kept their carriages, and took their outings drawn by pairs of sedate horses and supported in their state by coachmen and footmen of mature age. "I often think," said his grandfather, as they watched the constant stream of these slow-moving equipages, "that for elderly people of position and property it must be pleasanter to live in a nice house in a place like this than in a big country house, which costs an enormous amount to keep up, and they don't

know what to do with themselves in it half the time. Now if Sir James . . ." He broke off. "I suppose your aunt has told you about Sir James, Tony," he said.

"Yes. I can't get used to the idea of it."

"Well, it's a thing that ought not to be. I can't help feeling that, and I had to say so to Sir James. We've never been very close together. In the ordinary way I should have kept quiet about it; but in my position I had a duty to perform, and I couldn't shirk it. I told him that it wasn't right, that it would upset the ideas of people, and work harm—especially to the younger ones. But of course he had made up his mind, and the girl's parents had consented. I couldn't expect to make an impression upon him."

"Was he angry at your saying that to him?" Tony began to think that more of interest was to be gained on the subject from his grandfather than from his aunt.

"Oh, I don't think he minded much what I said to him. He has gone his own way all his life and cared little what others thought of him. He said things that I wouldn't repeat and don't like to remember. The only thing he said that I could accept at all was that he wanted a son to succeed him; but if he wanted that so much he might have married years ago, and a lady in his own position in life. As far as he is concerned there's no particular harm in it, I suppose. He reminded me—I don't mind telling you that—that a hundred years ago nobody would have had a word to say about such a marriage. Well, it may be so. The country squires of those days were coarser in manners altogether—I've learnt that from my reading—and a big land owner wasn't so amenable to public opinion, and did very much as he liked on his own property. I sometimes think that we haven't moved far away from those times at Merstead.

It saddened me to think that I hadn't done much to improve my people in all the years I've lived and worked among them. It was what decided me to make the break, a few years before I had thought of doing so—more than because I didn't like what was coming."

"It seems funny to think of Alice as Lady March, living in that great house as its mistress, when she has been a servant."

"Poor girl!" was all the old man had to say to that. Tony wanted to hear about what the change would mean to the Cuttings, but divined that his grandfather would not care to embark upon that kind of gossip, and did not like to ask a direct question. "I'm surprised at Bob Cutting," he ventured. "He seemed to be so particular about all his children." He wondered, as he said it, what his grandfather would think if he were to be told what Bob Cutting had said to him, to give him that impression. Still, he didn't understand why Bob had given way, apparently without a protest. Bob looked up to Sir James as his overlord, in the way of all the tenantry of Merstead, but his sturdy sense of the dignity of his own manhood might have been expected to overrule that tendency in such a matter as this.

"I talked to Cutting," said the old man. "He was as near rude to me as he could be, which showed, I thought, that he was ashamed of himself, as well he might be. He said things that I don't like to remember either—about Sir James being an old man, and it's not being for long. He doesn't want anything for himself out of it—I'll do him that justice; but he expects benefit for his family. You remember Tabitha, who was at the Rectory? She is to be sent to school—turned into a lady, as they say. And there are younger children who are to be educated. Cutting says he is going to pay for it himself, and I

fancy he doesn't much care about doing it, though he must have made money of late years."

"But if he pays for it himself how is he benefited by Sir James?"

"Ah, that's what I asked him. I said: 'It will cost you a lot of money to take them out of the sphere in which you've been quite contented yourself, and they won't be any the happier for it.' He scratched his head in his slow way, and didn't seem to have thought of that. He could only say that he wasn't going to be beholden to Sir James for anything."

"Then he doesn't like Sir James."

"I don't think he wants to be on any different terms with him from what he's always been. He certainly won't make any difference in his own way of living or in his work. I have an idea, from something I heard, that Sir James offered to buy him a business somewhere else. He said he wasn't going to move from Merstead unless he was turned out, and if he was turned out he should stop the marriage. The working of their minds is a puzzle. I thought I knew them pretty well by this time, but I couldn't make any headway with Cutting. I should think it will be a disagreeable position for him; his daughter will be living in the same place, but he'll be cut off from her. Perhaps he doesn't see that yet, but I think it will be so. And his younger children—they'll grow up to look down on their parents. That's all that Cutting and his wife will get out of it."

"Did you talk to Alice, grandfather?"

"No. I left that to your aunt. She'll tell you about it, I dare say, if you ask her. It's a painful subject to me, Tony. I've told you a great deal, because Merstead has been almost like your own home, hasn't it? And the Cuttings were almost like friends of yours—well, they

were friends, weren't they? Why, you took Alice sailing, I remember, and little Tabitha too."

Tony didn't want to go into that, and didn't suppose that his aunt would tell him anything at all about her conversation with Alice, even if he asked her. He did ask, as a final question, when the marriage was to take place, and his grandfather told him that it was to be immediately after Christmas. That, with his subsequent letter-writings, ended the matter for him, for the time being.

Just as they were about to leave their shelter to return home, there came mincing along the parade, followed or preceded by five diminutive dogs of no established breed, but inclining partly to pug, a lady dressed in a heavily beaded mantle with a juvenile-looking hat on her ringleted head. Tony was just about to draw his grandfather's attention to her odd appearance, when he recognized her as his, or rather Henry's, Aunt Charlotte, and gained something of a shock from the way she had altered since he had last seen her, while remaining in some respects ludicrously the same.

Middle-aged ladies did sometimes wear their hair in ringlets in those days, and Aunt Charlotte had always done so. But her hair was grey now, and inclining to white, and it was not confined under a bonnet, which was then almost *de rigueur* in public, except for young girls. So were long skirts, but Aunt Charlotte's stopped short at the tops of her elastic-sided boots. She was a figure of fun, but didn't seem to recognize it. She came up to them, her face wreathed in smiles, which were as much for Tony as for Mr. Barrett, for from the flood of speech which she poured out it could be gathered that she had expected to see him before long.

"Lor', how you've grown, dear!" she said. "And such

a good-looking boy too! Don't you think so, Mr. Barrett? Better-looking than Henry—oh, by a long way! But the Witherses were never ones for good looks, and Henry's more of a Withers than a Dare. Now will you both come and drink a cup of tea with me? Do say yes, don't say no."

Mr. Barrett, however, did say no. His daughter would be expecting them at home, and might be alarmed if they didn't come. Aunt Charlotte giving way at last engaged Tony to visit her the next morning, and finally allowed them to proceed on their way.

"What a funny old thing!" said Tony, when they were out of earshot. "Everybody is staring and laughing at her."

"She is perhaps rather odd in appearance," the old man admitted, "but I am sure she has a good heart. She took a good deal of trouble about our getting into our house, and—oh, yes, I'm sure she's kind-hearted. But perhaps she is rather odd. Yes, I think you might call her odd, without being uncharitable."

CHAPTER XXI

AUNT CHARLOTTE

TONY went to see Aunt Charlotte the next morning, not without anticipations of pleasure, or at least of interest. She was an oddity, as his grandfather had said and his Aunt Bertha had afterwards endorsed, and he rather hoped that he would not be expected to appear much in public with her. But, from Stephen's account, there was profit to be gained from her. He wanted to see how she lived, and he wanted to hear her opinion of Laura, and how it was that they seemed to have quarrelled. And new acquaintances were always an interest to him, for his curiosity was insatiable.

The wind had died down and the sun was shining in a clear sky as he walked along by the sea, enjoying the sparkle and the brightness of the winter day and the sight of the people, most of whom seemed to be in enjoyment of complete leisure, and of money to support it. As he went by the swimming baths at the end of the parade the warm sticky smell coming up through the skylight, and the hollow sound of voices and splashing, made him wish that he could take his pleasure in them. Later on he would, for Henry had presented him with another sovereign, and though he had his Christmas presents to buy out of it, a few shillings might be spared for his own amusement. He lingered over the shops in Robertson Street, especially the bookseller's and stationer's, and picked out something for Stephen and something for Ruth, but could not stay to buy it now.

Aunt Charlotte lived in a neat little bow-windowed

house in one of the streets that climbed the hill behind the old town. Tony was admitted by an elderly maid, who said: "Oh, you're Master Dare. The mistress is expecting you. Yes, I should have known you anywhere from your likeness to your father. Better take off your coat."

Tony, who was getting on for seventeen, did not care about being addressed as Master Dare, but was interested to hear that he was like his father. One of the things he wanted to learn from Aunt Charlotte was the sort of terms she had been on with his father.

He was shown into the dining-room and greeted with vociferation by the three pugoids and with scarcely less by Aunt Charlotte, who in a much betrimmed gown, her hands mittened and her grey cork-screw curls bobbing, jumped up out of her chair by the fire and flew to kiss him, explaining in the same breath that she had decided to do so after seeing how nice he looked the day before, that she was getting just a weeny bit deaf, which was why she hadn't heard him come in, and that he mustn't think she usually read novels at that time of the morning, but she had not been able to settle to anything until he came.

Tony was inclined to regret that his attractions had brought upon him the liability to be kissed on all occasions, for the touch of Aunt Charlotte was rather like that of gold-beater's skin, and he had a suspicion that there was not much difference with her between public and private. However, she had evidently taken a fancy to him, and he liked that, if he hadn't yet arrived at any great liking for Aunt Charlotte. He liked the warm cosiness of her room too, which was large enough to contain the furniture adapted to daily pursuits as well as that for the setting out of meals.

It was comfortable in the warm ugly mid-Victorian fashion of such rooms. There was a large table in the middle of it covered with a heavy fringed cloth; a side-board with a display of silver, and a dinner-wagon which held all sorts of miscellaneous articles, including books and newspapers; a large glass-fronted bookcase; a small davenport writing-desk by the window; a sofa covered with green rep opposite to it, and a flower-stand filled with little potted shrubs between them; easy-chairs to match the sofa on either side of the fireplace, and other chairs also to match wherever there was room for them. The curtains were of heavy dark plush, and over the lower panes of the window were muslin blinds on broad brass bands, to prevent the eyes of passers-by invading Aunt Charlotte's privacies. The walls were covered with a crimson flock paper, which was covered in its turn by heavily framed paintings, of which some were landscapes or seascapes and some were portraits of self-satisfied men and women dressed in their best and sitting still doing nothing. It was a very comfortable-looking room, and seemed to suit Aunt Charlotte to perfection.

She offered Tony port and sherry and cake, and he accepted the cake, but refused the wine, because he didn't like it. Aunt Charlotte commended him for this. He was too young to drink wine, she said, which did many young men a great deal of harm, because they never knew when to stop. She took very little herself, but the doctor had ordered her a glass of port in the middle of the morning, and she would take it now so as to keep him company. So they sat opposite to one another eating large lumps of seed cake, and were very friendly.

Tony found no difficulty in directing Aunt Charlotte's talk into any channel that he wished it to take. As long as she could talk she didn't seem to mind what she

talked about, and he gained much information from her on that first morning upon various subjects in which he was interested.

The trouble about Laura seemed to be that she turned up her nose at honest trade. "I don't know what sort of people she comes from. I never *have* known," said Aunt Charlotte, with scathing emphasis. "I believe Henry first met her at Ramsgate, when she was there for a holiday with her mother, who *said* she was a widow. Well, she may have been; but let me tell you this, Tony," here she leaned towards him and pointed with her finger, "there are widows and widows. It's easy enough for a widow to pretend that her husband was anything you like to mention, and where's the husband to contradict it?"

"Dead," said Tony, entering into the spirit of the enquiry.

"Exactly! And dead men tell no tales, they say. Is Laura ashamed of her own father?"

"She's never mentioned him to me."

"No. And she's never mentioned him to me either. Well, I'm not ashamed of my dear father—that's his portrait that you see there, taken in oils by an artist who once had a picture refused by the Royal Academy, and the frame alone cost twenty pounds—and I'm not ashamed of what he was either, whatever others may be. He left me enough money to enable me to live in the comfortable way that you see, and not only to think of myself all the time, but to do a little bit for others too. And he left my sister enough to start her husband nicely in a good business when he was only a shipping clerk to begin with, and— Why, bless me, of course that was your father, Tony. Well, I'm sure I never meant to let out secrets, and clerk or no clerk, Edward Dare was

always the perfect gentleman, and you and Henry both take after him, though I'm bound to say— But perhaps I'd better not say anything and bygones shall be bygones, poor fellow! I'm sure nobody was more sorry than I was to hear of his death, and would have come to the funeral, but perhaps better not under all the circumstances."

This was more in the way of revelation than Tony had bargained for. He didn't want to offend Aunt Charlotte, at the beginning of what bid fair to be a prosperous friendship, but had to risk it. "I think as you've told me as much as that," he blurted out, "you ought to tell me more." As she didn't take him up at once he added: "I loved father better than anybody else."

"And quite right too, Tony dear, *quite* right," she said with emphasis. "And I'm sure he was deserving of it in every possible way. I should be the last one in the world to want anything different, and when I said he was only a shipping clerk you must remember that every young man going into business has to begin as a clerk, and there's nothing in that, but I wouldn't have said it if I'd remembered for the moment he was your father."

"Oh, I don't mind that," said Tony, who did mind it nevertheless. "But why was it better that you shouldn't go to his funeral?"

"Well, I'll make a clean breast of it, Tony. We didn't get on, dear. I liked him, but he didn't like me, and didn't make me welcome in his house, and I'd left off going there for many years. That's all. A person doesn't like not to be liked, you must understand, dear, and perhaps I've always felt a little sore about it. But I'm sure it's all wiped out now, what with your poor father dying so suddenly, dear fellow; and my taking such a fancy to you, and Mr. and Miss Barrett being so

extremely affable and wishing not to make differences, I shouldn't wish to think any more about it, nor you either, dear."

It was still rather puzzling, but there seemed to be no reflection upon his father in it, for it was not a fault in him to dislike Aunt Charlotte, whose volubility must have assorted ill with his customary reserve. Her praise of his grandfather and aunt seemed to hint at that idea of his father's second marriage being of a higher quality than his first, which Tony had always taken for granted, though of late he had become ashamed of himself for having rested upon it. But he returned in some slight degree to that attitude as he said: "I think it's rather fine of Aunt Bertha to do what she is doing."

She took this up at once, enthusiastically. "Oh, Tony dear, I'm sure it's a lesson to us all. Such calmness! Such tact! Such—such—aristocraticness! I'm sure I felt when Henry told me of it, and asked me to help—Well, no, to be perfectly honest with you, Tony dear, the first thing I said to myself was: 'Ah! so it's the Barretts coming to the Witherses, is it?' But that feeling didn't last long after I'd seen the Reverend Barrett and Miss Barrett. *She* is better than me, I said to myself, and I shouldn't be an honest woman unless I acknowledged it. Money isn't everything, I said to myself. If *I* hadn't got money behind me, what should I be? Funny old Miss Withers! Oh, I know well enough what they say of me behind my back, however they may pay court to me to my face, because I'm always ready with my guinea or my two guineas for any good object. But Miss Barrett! Oh, that's quite different. *She* could send anybody to the right about without giving them a sixpence, and they wouldn't think any the less of her either. She's a fine woman, Tony, and a *noble* woman, and so is

her dear good father; and so *affable*. No false pride about *them*, dear! No wearing eyeglasses and turning up noses about *them*!”

They seemed to have come back to Laura, and her dislike of honest trade. Some further interest might be extracted from that. “What was it Laura turned up her nose about?” Tony asked.

“Baths. Tin baths,” said Aunt Charlotte. “My dear father, who was always one for bodily cleanliness, invented a patent bath, for himself you understand, Tony dear. And my dear mother, who was a true helpmate to him, and thought no more, I’ve often heard him say, of selling a penn’orth of tin-tacks across the counter, if there was a press in the shop, than sending out a bill for a large order—for she used to keep the books in their early days—she said why not patent it? So he did, and it was a great success, and if he’d lived longer he’d have made a large fortune no doubt. As it was he left mother and us two girls very comfortably off, but the people the business was sold to made the fortune.”

“But what does Laura object to in that?”

“Oh, it was the shop, dear. I needn’t talk so much about the shop, she said, and that put my back up, Tony. I own it. Because it was the shop that did it all. If father hadn’t been an ironmonger he couldn’t have had his bath made for himself, and he couldn’t have exhibited one for sale and had it snapped up immediately, and then more, until it became a big business. Why should I be ashamed of the shop? I should be ashamed of myself if I *was* ashamed of it. Everybody’s welcome to know my money comes from a shop, and they do know it, and if they don’t like it they can do the other thing.”

Tony was willing to give full credit to Aunt Charlotte for not being ashamed of her origins, but certain details

of the picture she had sketched somewhat disturbed him. It seemed to have been so very much of a shop, and the portrait that faced him over the mantelpiece, with a slight reminder of Henry about the eyes and nose, was so very much that of an ironmonger that it was difficult to think of its prototype following any other calling. "How did father come to know—er—?"

"My sister, Minnie? Ah, I see you're wondering how *he* can have come to mix himself up with a shop."

Tony hastily disclaimed the charge, but it was true nevertheless. His father might have begun his business life as a clerk, but he couldn't have been, surely, of the same class as these people to begin with. He had never told Tony much about his ancestry, but the impression was that he had come from country stock, which had died out. There were distant cousins, not of his own name, somewhere in the West country, but even the place was unspecified, and Tony had never seen any of them.

"He was a handsome young man, with a beautiful pair of whiskers," said Aunt Charlotte. "Except for the whiskers, Tony dear, you're the living image of him and in your ways too. He was nice-spoken and smiling and gay, and no wonder Minnie fell in love with him, I'm sure, when he came about the shipping contract. That's how we first met. Father and mother took to him too, though you must know that our home life was carried on on very strict lines, and till he learnt to be careful about not mentioning dancing or theatres or anything of that sort, he was considered worldly. Even Minnie stood out against him at first; she was always more religious than I was; I was thought to be the flighty one, you know. However, she got to be so much in love with him, and he was so much in love with her, that it had to be. I must say that I believe he experienced a

real change of heart. Minnie wouldn't have married him if he hadn't, and father wouldn't have let her either. They had a happy life together as long as it lasted, and he got on very well in his business. They soon moved to a larger house. Father did start him in it. As I let that out at the beginning, there's no need to pretend about it. But he made the best of his chances, and of course he ended up much higher than dear father ended up. He was always talking about moving, father was, as the business got bigger and bigger, but he never did move and died in the house over the shop after all."

"When did father go to Ifield Lodge?"

"Oh, that was when mother died, two or three years after father. Then the money was divided up between me and Minnie, and of course there was plenty for both of us, and it was only natural that they should want to live in a nice house. Poor Minnie didn't live long to enjoy it, but I was always glad your father had that nice place to fall back on, for her death was a great shock to him, poor fellow, and till he married again there wasn't much else for him to enjoy."

All this gave Tony a great deal to think about. There were certain questions he would have liked to put to Aunt Charlotte, but feared her perception of what would have lain behind them, of which she had already shown him an example. He did ask her if she had known his mother.

"Oh, yes, and a sweet pretty thing she was," said Aunt Charlotte generously. "I'm sure *I* never felt any jealousy about his marrying again, and should have been glad to make friends with his second, being rather lonely in the world, and not living here then, where I've made my *niche*, Tony; and I suppose I'm as happy as most people, and try to do a little good with the blessings

bestowed upon me. And, oh, Tony, I've got a little present for you, which I went and bought after I'd seen you yesterday. Not much, but I hope we shall be friends, you and I, and see a great deal of one another while you're here."

The mention of a present roused the spirit of cupidity in Tony, which had a set-back when Aunt Charlotte produced a sprigged purple tie made of silk, but not good silk, and already sewn into a knot to save the wearer trouble. Tony remembered the cheap presents she had brought him in his childhood, but he also remembered the handsome tips she had given Ruth and Stephen. He thanked her, with as much enthusiasm as he could muster without actually perjuring himself, and hoped that the good-will this present showed her to possess towards him would show itself later in other forms. He was not, however, prepared for the immediate present of a golden sovereign, which she pressed upon him, with almost shame-faced apologies, before he left her. Certainly she was odd, but as certainly she was kind. He was to go to an entertainment with her on the pier that afternoon, and, though he rather dreaded appearing in public with her, thought he could put up with it for the sake of the rewards it might bring him. Aunt Charlotte was worth cultivating, but he did like her, in spite of her oddities. He had to tell himself that, to remove the sense of self-dissatisfaction brought by his mercenary thoughts; but it was true. She had revealed herself in all her crude ideas, and there was nothing in them or behind them that did her any discredit.

Going back along Robertson Street, with such an accession of tangible wealth, he had to go into the bookshop to buy something. He bought a stylographic pen for Stephen. He could use it himself to see how he liked

it, until it was time to post it for Christmas. The little morocco-bound note-book and pencil would be just the thing for Aunt Bertha. So there were two of his Christmas presents satisfactorily settled, and plenty of money left for the others. He thought he would buy something for himself, and then he thought he wouldn't. It was a pity to spoil the virtuous feeling that came from buying presents for other people. After all, he'd had a present himself that morning. He chuckled as he thought of Aunt Charlotte's tie in his pocket, and what he would say to Stephen about it. He left the shop without further purchases, but turned aside at the end of the street to find the pastry-cook's Stephen had told him of, where they sold such wonderful cream tarts. They were as good as Stephen had said they were, and in spite of Aunt Charlotte's seed-cake and the approach of Aunt Bertha's dinner hour, he ate as many of them as he wanted to before he made his way homewards. As he passed the Baths, the idea struck him that he could now afford to disport himself in them with some frequency, and he went to the office to make enquiries. He found that he could have a monthly ticket for a sum that would not make too big a hole in his holiday fortune, and bought one to begin on the next day. This was something that would make a lot of difference to him. He could have as many swims as he liked, two or three a day if he wanted to. These holidays were going to be great fun—better even than Merstead in the winter. How jolly it would have been if Stephen or somebody had been there to play about with him! He would write and tell him all about it.

During the next few days, in the intervals of amusing himself, and cultivating the graces of Aunt Charlotte, Tony thought a good deal about what she had told

him. It was upon his father that his thoughts rested, with a kind of puzzlement of which he could hardly tell whether it was agreeable or the reverse. He still stood to him as a figure of quiet dignity, not touched by the "commonness" that Aunt Charlotte had tacitly admitted to have lain about her early years, and that still showed itself in her, though her honesty and kindly nature out-balanced it. There was something about the picture she had drawn of him in his early years that did not fit in with Tony's view of him. A smiling gay young man, with "a way with him," very much in love, anxious to get on, wanting a beautiful house the moment he could afford it. Why, it might have been a portrait of Tony himself, as he recognized himself in moments of self-revelation. Was it possible that he should ever come to be satisfied with the kind of life into which his father had subsided in his later years—living in his beautiful house, but not caring for much about it in the way that Tony cared about houses, content with a few friends and with scarcely any recreation outside, finding his chief pleasure in reading, profitless to produce anything, and above all, content to undergo the daily round of business occupation in that comfortless office, day after day, month after month the whole year through, except for the few weeks of holiday?

For some cause which he did not define to himself, Tony shrank from putting any more questions to Aunt Charlotte; but Aunt Bertha might be able to tell him something that would adjust the picture to his satisfaction. He knew that she, and his grandfather too, had liked and respected his father. He wanted to hear something that would get rid of that uncomfortable feeling of his owing so much to the family of his first wife, not only his start in the business that Aunt Charlotte had

admitted that he had built up for himself, but, as it now appeared, Ifield Lodge itself, at any rate at the time at which he had first enjoyed it.

But Aunt Bertha had little to tell him, or at least told him little. His father had first met his mother when he had been staying for a quiet holiday at Merstead. Tony had known that, but had not known before that this was almost immediately after the death of his first wife, when he had wanted to live very quietly to himself, and that it was not until he had gone there twice again that his second marriage had been brought about. He must have been still comparatively young then, though he did not appear as a young man in Aunt Bertha's recollections of him. He had rowed and sailed and fished, but he had read a great deal too. That was what had attracted the Rector to him—a quiet studious well-to-do suitor for his daughter's hand, with whom he felt himself at his ease. Aunt Bertha, too, always talked with that idea of him showing through everything she said. It might possibly have been a surprise to her to come across Aunt Charlotte as representing something unfamiliar in his earlier life. But she gave no hint of any such feeling. She would smile at Aunt Charlotte's vagaries, but would encourage no speculation about her antecedents, or any criticism of her that went beneath the surface. Aunt Charlotte in her funny way was as real as Aunt Bertha. There was something in each of them that the other could respect.

CHAPTER XXII

MR. STENNING AGAIN

MISS BARRETT was fortunate with her new venture at the very outset. She had only just set in hand the business of getting her rooms known when a London doctor came down to make enquiries and finally took them all indefinitely for a "mental case." A perfectly harmless old lady, suffering from acute melancholy, was established there at the New Year with two nurses and a maid, and when the house had settled down it was as if it were two houses, with very little to do with one another. The old lady was sometimes seen being taken out for her daily drive, and the women about her were sometimes met on the stairs, and that was about all, as far as Tony was concerned. He had rather looked forward to making new acquaintances from the letting of the rooms, but it was much better for Aunt Bertha as it was. She had no anxiety about her rooms standing empty for any time, and her housekeeping settled itself into a routine that gave her no more trouble than she had had at Merstead. Even her equable acceptance of life as it came to her was moved to an evident satisfaction at this piece of luck. She was bright and care-free, and found time to keep Tony company outdoors and in, as she would not have done if she had been immersed in the business she had taken up under other conditions. And the payment she received was highly satisfactory. The full price of all her rooms was paid without question, and they were not always occupied. "I shall make a good income as

long as it goes on," she said to Tony, "and there's no reason why it shouldn't go on for as long as the poor old creature lives. It's sad to think that she has so little to live for when she might have so much. Still, she gets the sun here, and everything that she's capable of enjoying, if she can enjoy anything, and there's no reason why *we* shouldn't enjoy the prosperity she has brought us. I think you and I and grandfather will go to the pantomime this afternoon, Tony, and sit in the most expensive seats; and I'm going to pay for your swimming as long as you're here; so you can use Miss Withers's money for something else."

There was a pantomime on at the theatre and another in the pavilion on the pier. Tony was a great frequenter of the one on the pier, entrance to which cost only a few pence, and fell slightly in love with all four of the sisters who divided its honours between them. It was rather thrilling to see them come on to the pier in their ordinary clothes, and then come on to the stage with their charms so much heightened. The youngest of them once smiled at him, and the funny man, who was at the head of it all, once stopped to ask him if he had such a thing as a match about him. He hadn't, and an acquaintance that might have introduced him into theatrical society was nipped in the bud.

The Baths were a great delight to him. He spent at least an hour in them every morning, and sometimes went for another swim in the afternoon. He became a practised diver, and it was a proud day for him when he first dived from the topmost stage. He made acquaintances at the Baths, and there were one or two boys whose company he had outside, some of them visitors, some residents. By the end of the holidays he had quite a little circle of friends. He was asked out here and there and

went to a few parties. The only thing he regretted Hilbury for at this time was the Christmas parties; but these made up, and other pursuits more than made up, and he was able to write glowing accounts of his doings to Stephen.

Aunt Charlotte surreptitiously pressed another sovereign upon him at Christmas, after presenting him in great publicity with a "Race Game," which could not have cost more than three shillings. Miss Barrett had asked her to eat her Christmas dinner with them, and she had accepted with grateful alacrity. She brought Christmas presents for her host and hostess too, a glass paper-weight with a view of Hastings Castle for Mr. Barrett, and for Miss Barrett a richly carved wooden pen-holder, so constructed that when you were tired of writing with it you could hold it up to one eye and refresh yourself with a glimpse of the Rigi. But she had also begged leave to contribute dessert to the feast, and the hothouse grapes and peaches and pine-apple she had sent round the day before must have cost three or four times as much as the rest of the dinner, and lasted for the Octave of the festival.

Aunt Charlotte was so pleased at the invitation she had received, and expressed her pleasure so profusely that it struck Tony that the poor old thing must be rather lonely, in spite of the numerous acquaintances she boasted, and the money she was always ready to disburse at their request. Aunt Bertha thought so too. "They are ready to take advantage of her generosity," she said, "but they don't give her much in return. I wish she hadn't sent us all that fruit, though I must say I enjoy eating it. I shan't allow anything of the sort again. If she likes to come here she'll be welcome, and

I shan't mind being seen about with her at all, though I do wish she'd wear her petticoats a little longer."

The Race Game came in handy for the after-dinner amusement, and Tony and his grandfather played it together in the evening afterwards. Aunt Charlotte showed herself a superb gambler, and made and lost fortunes, in nuts, without turning a hair of her corkscrew ringlets. When Tony convoyed her home she told him she had never enjoyed a Christmas so much since the days of her girlhood. "Ah, it's the *innocence* of home life that I enjoy so much, Tony dear," she said. "I believe I was made for family life, but I never had the chance of marrying, and I suppose it's too late to expect it now. There was something about me that young men didn't care about. Your dear father didn't care about me, though I admired him, I'm sure, and let him know it. Perhaps it was that he didn't like. Well, I've had *one* happy day anyhow. In all the years I've lived here it's the first time I've eaten my Christmas dinner in company. And such good company too. Good-night, Tony dear. Thank you for seeing me home. I won't ask you in now as it's getting late, but any other time you like to come, you know you'll be welcome. Here's just a little—er—um—er. Good-night, dear."

She had been fumbling in her pocket, and here palmed the sovereign upon him, and the door opening at that moment slipped inside it, and shut it firmly. He heard the bolts and chains being fastened as he turned away.

One morning towards the end of the holidays, as Tony was dressing after a swim, he saw from his box an elderly man step out of another one and adventure himself gingerly into the water, but when he had taken to it strike out with firm strokes, and swim the length of the bath

and back again. He saw his face, which seemed vaguely familiar, but until he had got away from the Baths, he thought it was somebody he had seen there before. Then it suddenly struck him that it was Mr. Stenning, and he stopped, half resolved to go back and make himself known to him. But he reflected that Mr. Stenning would not be at his most approachable, and it was nearly dinner-time. If he was staying here he would be sure to meet him again, either at the Baths or elsewhere.

He met him taking his airing the next morning, striding along at a great pace on his short legs, and wearing, apparently, exactly the same clothes as Tony had first seen him in six months before. He had neither overcoat nor gloves, and the wind was very cold though the sun was shining. His face and hands were of different shades of blue, but otherwise he looked comfortable. He had acquired such momentum that Tony had some difficulty in stopping him, but he showed pleasure when he realized who it was that had accosted him, and invited Tony to finish his walk with him.

Tony turned back, and they walked to the western end of the parade and then again up to the Baths, at the same rapid pace as Mr. Stenning had been taking. It was rapid enough to cause people to turn round and look at them, and Mr. Stenning's appearance in his wide-brimmed soft felt hat, of a kind hardly seen outside of the Colonies in those days, and his baggy homespun suit, no doubt caused further remark. It crossed Tony's mind that what with Aunt Charlotte and Mr. Stenning he might become widely known for his companionships. But he was proud enough to be the companion of a distinguished writer, and only wished that all these silly gaping people could know who Mr. Stenning was, though perhaps the information would not have conveyed much

to them. In his own winter overcoat he was perspiring freely before they had gone far, and if it had not been for his frequent bodily exercise in the Baths might not have been able to stay the pace until the end. He was glad enough when Mr. Stenning proposed a few minutes' rest in one of the shelters, with the remark: "I'm out of condition. We must have a real walk together, you and I, when I've got rid of some of my flabbiness."

Mr. Stenning seemed to have forgotten all about Tony's literary ambitions, which had been in abeyance of late. Some day he would be a great writer, but the time had not yet come to take the first steps. So he did not remind him of the important matter they had first discussed. Mr. Stenning remembered him chiefly, it appeared, for the large repast he had made on that afternoon at the Grange, and rallied him about it before they came to more serious subjects. Then he asked Tony for an account of himself since, and when he was told of his father's death and the breaking up of his home, expressed himself with much sympathy, which was made more apparent in the tones of his voice than in anything that he said, as he strode along intent upon the pace he was making.

Tony liked being sympathized with, and drew a picture of the contrast between his life at Ifield Cottage and what it had been at Ifield Lodge designed to extract further sympathy. But its effect was to reduce it. "I've always thought," said Mr. Stenning, "that the chief benefit of our much overrated Public School system was that it hardened off the young plant, which gets weedy under the enervating influence of the home, which is also a much overrated institution nine times out of ten. You were fortunate in having a kind father—mine was a terrible trial to me—and of course you miss him; but this Mrs.

Hawthorne of yours seems to be a sensible woman. I should like to meet her. You say that she allows you no more liberty outside than if you were a boarder."

"No. I'm not complaining about that, but—"

"Oh, I thought you were. What is it you do complain about?"

Tony laughed. He would have to keep his wits about him to cope with Mr. Stenning. The idea of coping with him came unbidden. He divined that Mr. Stenning might easily grow tired of his company if he merely hung respectfully on his words. "I hardly ever see the Hopwoods now," he said. "I used to love going there; they were all so jolly."

"Yes. I feel the same about them myself. Jolliness is exactly the feeling they induce in you. For myself, I can hardly imagine a more burdened lot than to live in a large house and have all sorts of people always coming to it. But for the people who do come it's different. The Hopwoods and their like play a beneficent part in life. I'm sorry you can't go to the Hopwoods as much as you used to. Still, Mrs. Hawthorne shows her wisdom in that as in other things. The trouble with people of your age—especially those of your abounding vitality—is that unless you bind them down they waste their opportunities; and what you waste at that time of life you never pick up again."

"I'm working harder at school now than I used to."

"Exactly. And you like working hard. Or, if you don't like it, you're so pleased with yourself for doing it that you get as much fun out of it as if you weren't working hard; perhaps rather more."

Tony laughed at that too. Mr. Stenning could see through you; it wasn't worth while offering a selection of your tastes and characteristics for his admiration as

a complete portrait. "I like it sometimes, and sometimes I don't," he said.

That did interest Mr. Stenning. He threw a shrewd glance at him, striding along by his side, his good-looking immature face flushed with the exercise, his eyes bright and the young smile on his lips. "Ah, you've hit the difficulty," he said, "the difficulty of temperaments like yours, and like mine too, though it may surprise you to hear it. There are such a lot of things worth doing, and you like doing them—sometimes, as you say—but you *must* idle. Yet you hate idling. Why is it?"

Tony hadn't thought of it quite like that. He wasn't sure that he did hate idling. He only hated it when he wasn't doing what he ought to have been doing, but was doing something quite uninteresting instead. Perhaps that was what Mr. Stenning meant. "I don't suppose you idle much now, sir," he said.

"Oh, now! What does it matter what I do now? But you're right; I don't. I don't let myself. I haven't much money and I haven't much time. I spend both of them carefully and make the most of them. But I'm an old prig, and you're a young spendthrift. Shall we sit down here for a minute or two? I'm fairly warmed up now and you seem to be in the melting stage. Perhaps I'm an old fool not to wear an overcoat. I should perspire much more freely, and perspiration is one of the salutary gifts of life. I don't wear one because I never have worn one, since I was about your age and was made to. That's the only reason, and it's a contemptible one. Who is this brisky juvenal who approaches?"

It was Aunt Charlotte who was tripping towards them, attended by her dogs, one of which was running on three legs in the manner of a fox-terrier, thus casting shame on its reputed ancestry. Tony had a qualm, but subdued

it. He had become fond of Aunt Charlotte and would accept full responsibility for her. He rose from his seat and took a step towards her. "Well, Tony dear!" she exclaimed in her carrying voice. "I thought you'd be having your swim at this time of the morning. I was going to wait for you till you came out and take you to Semadini's. Shall we go there now? I'm sure you'd like a cup of hot chocolate on this cold morning."

Apparently she had not noticed that he had been in conversation with Mr. Stenning, upon whom she cast curious glances, for among the wrapped up figures all about them his light-coloured clothes made him conspicuous. Tony was in a dilemma. He wanted to have his swim, and had hoped that Mr. Stenning would have proposed an adjournment to the Baths shortly; and he didn't want to leave Mr. Stenning. Nor did he quite know how to do so.

Mr. Stenning came to his rescue. He stood up and removed his large hat with the unseasonable pugaree wound round it. "If my young friend will make us known to one another," he said, "we might all three drink hot chocolate together."

Aunt Charlotte was in what she would have called a fluster, Tony hardly less so in his lack of experience of how introductions ought to be made. "My Aunt," he mumbled, and "Mr. Stenning."

"Very pleased and proud to meet you, I'm sure," said Aunt Charlotte. "A visitor, I presume, and I'm a resident—name, Miss Withers, which Tony forgot to mention, but not to be expected that everybody should know it."

It seemed like a dream to Tony to be walking by Aunt Charlotte, with Mr. Stenning on the other side of her,

the dogs about their feet, wheezing in realistic pug fashion. Mr. Stenning was making himself agreeable, regretting probably the unguarded remark he had made about Aunt Charlotte, who seemed to be in the seventh heaven at the affability of his conversation. The poor old thing was always so pleased if anybody took any notice of her. She said she was proud to meet Mr. Stenning, but it was unlikely that she had ever heard his name. She seemed to have jumped to the conclusion that he was an explorer, for in her broken chatter she twice mentioned Africa in connection with hot chocolate, to which she clung as the basis of conversation, and made reference to the shooting of lions. "Oh, I've never shot a lion," said Mr. Stenning. "I've never shot anything fiercer than a man."

Evidently he had the intention of being amusing, but Tony doubted whether Aunt Charlotte would catch on to this form of humour.

She did though. She laughed freely and said: "That's just how my dear father used to talk, and his face so solemn that you didn't know whether to laugh or not, till *he* laughed. But he never moved far away from Clapham, where he lived—and died. He always used to say 'Hame's best.'"

"Was he a Scotsman, madam?" enquired Mr. Stenning.

"Ah, now you're laughing at *me*," said Aunt Charlotte. "No, he was a pure John Bull, as he often used to say himself."

"It's by far the best thing to be."

"Oh, it is, Mr. Stebbing. You never spoke a truer word than that."

"Madam, how do you know that? I have spoken many

words of universal worth in my time. The words you have so kindly commended would not gain universal acceptance."

"Acceptance or no acceptance," said Aunt Charlotte, "Britannia rules the waves."

Tony awoke to the fact that Aunt Charlotte was coping with Mr. Stenning. She continued to cope with him as they sat over their hot chocolate, watching him out of her birdlike eyes, with her funny bobbing head on one side, and pouncing upon his words with a quickness that was simply amazing. She was a clever old woman, and he had scarcely had an idea of it. She was not only enjoying herself but arousing a like enjoyment in Mr. Stenning, whose eyes twinkled in a grave face as he led her on, until he laughed and said: "You've got the better of me, ma'am. I believe you'd get the better of anybody. I should take off my hat to you if I hadn't taken it off already."

"It would be better for you if you weren't to put it on again," Aunt Charlotte snapped at him with her quick nod. "You can't afford not to look like other people in this world; they don't like it. Oh, I know what you're laughing at. That from funny old Miss Withers! Well, you can take it from me. I ought to know."

Mr. Stenning was so appreciative of Aunt Charlotte, and she of him that this meeting at the pastry-cook's was repeated on the next two days, which were the last of Tony's holidays. On the third day Tony persuaded Miss Barrett to join the party, promising her rich entertainment. But she was rather scandalized at the freedom which Aunt Charlotte allowed herself, though her presence actually subdued it; for Aunt Charlotte's respect for her was such that she was unable to give her whole attention to coping with Mr. Stenning. Miss Bar-

rett didn't care much for Mr. Stenning either. "He may be very clever and all that, Tony," she said, as they went home together, "but I can't do with a man of his age who never speaks the truth. I don't mean to say that there's anything wrong in it. He's *being* clever all the time, and doesn't expect you to believe him. But there's no reasonable conversation to be had on those lines, and I like conversation to be reasonable. I hope when he comes to tea this afternoon he will talk sensibly. I rather wish you hadn't asked him, but as you admire him so much, and it's your last day, of course I'm glad that he should come for your sake."

Mr. Stenning came to tea and was reasonable. Mr. Barrett said that he had seldom met with a man so well-informed, and Miss Barrett said that she had been mistaken in him, and it was evident that he kept his nonsense for those that liked it.

Mr. Stenning was reasonable too as Tony walked back to his rooms with him. He talked to him kindly, and said that he was coming up to Hilbury to see him when he got back to London.

CHAPTER XXIII

A DISTURBANCE

How dull and depressing it was to get back to the grind of school work, and to the restrictions of Ifield Cottage, after that happy occupied holiday! There was some pleasure in seeing Ruth and Stephen again, but Tony's always shifting prepossessions had turned away from Mrs. Hawthorne. After the lavish petting he had received from Aunt Charlotte, and the affectionate comfortable terms he was on with Aunt Bertha, she seemed stiff and unsympathetic to the last degree.

The hard discomfort of the little room he shared with Stephen, with its glimpse of close-set winter trees instead of the wide prospect of the sea, affected his spirits, and the sitting-room, dark in winter-time, and always seeming to be crowded, no less so. The weather was dreadful, with constant rain and sleet, which prevented even the playing of outdoor games, though these would not have been particularly amusing at this time of the year; and the Big Schoolroom, in which the Sixth Form was located, was of a shivering chilblain-producing temperature.

There was one bright spot. Tony was in possession of what amounted to a considerable fortune for a schoolboy of his age and standing, at a time when schoolboys were less indulged with pocket-money than they seem to be now-a-days. He had been lavish with Aunt Charlotte's benefactions during the holidays, but she had given him another sovereign to bring back with him; Mr. Stenning had tipped him ten shillings on bidding him farewell; his

grandfather had given him five shillings, and Miss Barrett half-a-crown; Laura, with whom he had spent the day on his return from St. Leonards, had offered him five shillings, and when he had thanked her, and told her that he really didn't want it, because of what Aunt Charlotte and others had done for him, she had insisted upon his accepting ten. Henry had not added to his capital this time, but had arranged with Mrs. Hawthorne to give him a shilling a week pocket-money. So he would never be quite without funds, as had happened for the last few weeks of the previous term, even if he should have dissipated his preliminary hoard, which, however, seemed impossible with so much in hand.

He treated his friends royally. At the beginning of the term the various tuckshops in the town were full of boys during the hours at which they could be visited, but Tony had almost the monopoly of a table in one of them, and it came to be known that he was always ready to stand treat. There were some who took advantage of his hospitality, but though he was not of a nature to grudge his expenditure on anybody who made himself pleasant to him, or to look for a mercenary reason, he was not above ingratiating himself with those with whom he wished to stand well by frequent open-handed offerings. He was in the Sixth; he had his Third Eleven Colours both at cricket and football. He was in the swim, and in time would blossom out into a swell if he stayed at school long enough; but at present he was only in the stage of consolidating his position among the swells, some of whom were still rather distant with him.

He was still a day-boy, cut off from the interests and closer friendships of the Houses, and now much more tied up with Stephen in general estimation. And Stephen was far behind him in that estimation. He was a diligent

but clumsy player of games, and had gained no colours; and his social gifts were small, although there were those of his own standing who valued him as a humourist. But he had no ambition to push his way into the society of those above him, and sat tongue-tied when he was included in a party of them; or, if he entered the conversation, failed to catch the right tone, and was made to feel that he didn't belong.

It was a point of honour with Tony not to leave Stephen out of anything, but he was beginning to think that he would like to, on occasions, when Stephen saved him the trouble by withdrawing himself. "It's jolly decent of you always to ask me," he said, "but—well, I hope you won't mind—but I don't care about being treated so much more than I can treat you—see?"

"Oh, that's rot," said Tony, the generosity in him aroused. "We're pals, and it's just a chance that I've got more than you have. Perhaps I shan't always have."

"You won't at the rate you're bluing it," said Stephen with a grin. "Anyhow, you're jolly decent about it, and if it was only you and me I shouldn't mind. But I don't care about it with those other fellows. They know you're always treating me, and—well, I don't care about it."

His repetitive, "don't care about it" was rather irritating. "I treat them too," said Tony.

"Yes, but they're worth it, you see. I'm not."

"What do you mean—worth it?" Tony was inclined to be up in arms now. But Stephen was not in one of his tiresome moods. "People like you much better than they like me," he said. "It's only natural. I shall have to wait till I get higher up before I can go about with the swells. It's all right for you, but I don't care about it."

The "all right for you" removed the offence of the "don't care about it." Tony didn't want to push Stephen into accusing him of "sucking up," the school-boy formula which expressed so much. "Well, if you don't care about it," he said, with a slightly acid inflection, "I won't ask you every time. I'll tell you what, though: I'll buy some delicacies for home consumption. You said you didn't mind if it was only you and me. And Ruth can join in too."

"I expect the mater'll have something to say about that," said Stephen. "She said the other day that I was going too much to the tuckshops, and asked me where I got the money from."

"Did you tell her?"

"Oh, I suppose she knew. I said I didn't always pay for myself, and she didn't ask me any more."

Tony had an idea that Mrs. Hawthorne's attitude towards him at this time was one of slight disfavour, and if it were so, this probably accounted for it. She wouldn't have allowed Stephen to spend so much money over "grub," even if he had it. But Tony did not suppose that she would prevent him spending his own money in any way that pleased him. Though strict in some ways she had shown herself unexpectedly lenient in others. And it seemed to him that her severity was relaxing all round. She had never allowed Ruth and Stephen to go to dances before this last Christmas, though curiously enough she had made no objection to Ruth's joining the dancing-class at her school. But Stephen told him that they had gone to dances during the holidays. "I think it was old Broadbeans who persuaded her," he said, scratching his head in the funny way he had when he was puzzled. "He's very fond of Ruth. Ruth likes it, but I don't care about it. She had to teach me how to do

it, and it was all a silly grind—in the holidays too! And I'm no good at it even now, though I like going to the parties. I suppose if the mater thinks it is all right it is all right, but—"

"Your pater didn't approve of dancing, did he?"

"Mr. Blair says he didn't. He came up one afternoon, when Ruth and I were going to the Collingwoods', and said father wouldn't have liked it. I thought it was awful cheek, and I believe the mater did too. Anyhow she shut him up."

"How ripping! I told you I didn't like him. How did she do it?"

"She said that for young people before they were grown up to go to parties where they danced wasn't the same as going to dances, and she didn't think father would have minded that."

Tony was vaguely disappointed. It seemed to be something of a quibble, and not much of a snub either, which Mr. Blair had deserved for his meddling. "Didn't he say any more?" he asked.

"Yes, but the mater said she had thought it over well, and decided about it. He didn't say any more after that."

Whether or no Mrs. Hawthorne's new-found lenience would have prevented her from interfering in Tony's methods of expenditure if he had not gone under with a very bad bilious attack, she did so decisively when Dr. Cookson said it was brought on by his over-indulgence. "I'm not altogether sorry this has happened," she said, "though it is unfortunate that you should lose two or three days of school through being so greedy. You are much too old for that sort of thing, and I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself for what has happened. In any case it is a very wrong way of spending

money, and I'm sure that the people who were kind enough to give it you would be disgusted if they knew of the way in which you have wasted it. Considering your age, I haven't liked to say that you must give me your money to take care of, but now I've no hesitation in telling you to do that. You may keep five shillings of it, and you will have your shilling a week, and if you want any more for anything special you can ask me for it."

Tony was consumed with inward fury against her. To be lectured in that way, and treated as if he were a naughty child, at his age! But she had him at a disadvantage, sitting by the bed in which he so ignominiously lay. "I often used to have bilious attacks at home," he said, sulkily.

"I've no doubt you did," she said. "Please tell me where your money is, and I will take all but five shillings of it now."

This was the Mrs. Hawthorne of Tony's previous imaginings, whom, however, he saw in this mood for the first time. He hated her as she walked out of the room, carrying the bulk of his liquid assets with her. Never again would he treat her with confidence, or pretend that he regarded her as anything but an enemy. She had put a gross affront upon him. It would be difficult even to be friendly with Stephen, the often tiresome son of a perfectly impossible mother.

The winter day was closing. Tony lay in the gathering dusk, feeding himself with bitter thoughts, and every now and then shaking with rage and humiliation. He longed for Stephen to come home, that he might vent upon him the anger that he had not dared to show to Mrs. Hawthorne. Then he remembered that Stephen was going to tea with Bradbury, straight from school. Both of them had been going, by special favour, as it was their

evening for the gymnasium, to which they would have gone immediately afterwards. Surely it was bad enough to be cut off that little pleasure, for no fault of his, without being insulted besides! There weren't many pleasures to look forward to in this beastly life, which was really more like being in prison than anything. He supposed she'd let him have some tea. If Jessie brought it up, and took it upon herself to lecture him again, as she had done when she had brought him up his apology for a lunch, he would talk to her in a way that would surprise her, and she might tell Mrs. Hawthorne if she liked. He hoped she would, and if Mrs. Hawthorne came up again to express her displeasure with him—well, this time she wouldn't have it all her own way. There were limits to what he was going to stand from her.

But it was Ruth who brought him up his tea, and her own with it. Ruth was the one person in the house with whom he was not prepared to deal ungently. She lit the candles, drew down the blind, and spread the repast, apologising for the larger share of it that was hers. "But mother thought you would rather have my company, even if you have to see me eat when you can't," she said. "Afterwards we'll play the Race Game, if you feel well enough. I may stay for three-quarters of an hour, and then I must go and do my prep."

So Tony's wrath was somewhat abated. It was fairly decent of Mrs. Hawthorne to let Ruth come to him. She must have meant to show him that the row was over as far as she was concerned. He wasn't at all sure that he was going to have it so, but in the meantime he might as well make the best of the little spurt of cheerfulness that Ruth brought with her. She seemed to know exactly how to behave in a sickroom. She brought him his dressing-gown, and arranged his pillows so that he could

sit up. She attended to his meagre requirements during the meal, and administered his medicine to him afterwards, first shaking it, as directed. She restored some of his self-respect by treating him as an invalid, and not the only begetter of a mere bilious attack, and gave him many pleasant details of illnesses from which she had suffered herself. She confessed to having, on balance, enjoyed them. "German measles was the best," she said. "My fingers felt like balloons the first night, and I was frightfully thirsty. But after that I only felt peaceful. I expect you'll feel like that to-morrow; and I believe you're going to have chicken for dinner."

The effect of Ruth's visit was that Tony thought he had better not make any further disturbance. He was in an undignified position anyhow, and if nobody else wanted to emphasize it there was no advantage in doing so himself. Mrs. Hawthorne treated him as usual and gave him no excuse for showing his resentment. But the resentment, though lessened, did not altogether disappear, and for the first time since he had come to Ifield Cottage, he felt himself uncomfortable there, and out of tune with the strenuous life he had to live during term-time. He went back to school with no eagerness to make up the ground he had lost, and never did make it up. At the end of the term he was in exactly the same position in the Sixth as when he had entered it. Even Stephen was two places above him.

Mr. Stenning paid his promised visit. He came one Sunday afternoon, having walked up the hill from London, and proposing to walk back again. He had discarded his big felt hat and his clothes of light homespun, but he had not replaced them with the costume of Sunday observance, and in paying a call upon a Sunday he was unwittingly breaking one of the conventions

under which Mrs. Hawthorne lived. Of all the prohibitions to which Tony had had to adapt himself at Ifield Cottage that which forbade the use of Sunday freedom from work for social intercourse had seemed to him the most unreasonable. He had accepted it during his first term there in the broad spirit of tolerance which had then seemed easy enough to practise, because his general trend had been towards self-discipline, and he had put himself into line with Stephen in taking what his home-life offered and finding most of it good. But now he was in an incipient state of revolt, and Mr. Stenning's visit advanced his dissatisfaction by several stages.

He did not know that the elderly gentleman coming into the room in which the four of them were quietly reading, while tea was in process of being laid on the big table, was bringing the abhorred taint of atheism with him. Tony had talked a good deal about his illustrious friend when he had first come back, and Mrs. Hawthorne had said little, but made her enquiries. She had read one book of Robert Stenning's, taken from the library of the Literary Institute, after Stephen and Tony had gone to bed. She had not understood the full force of its irony, but had disliked it as much as if she had. Then she had consulted Mr. Broadbent, after he had come round one evening to read Browning, in whom the literary circles of Hilbury were at that time interested. Mr. Broadbent's robust if narrow understanding well qualified him to pronounce on a matter of literary criticism. He would not deny that Robert Stenning was a writer to be respected, if it were only a question of good writing. He had had a University education and was well-read in the classics, though he did not invariably deal respectfully with them. But Mr. Broadbent was also a clergyman. In the ordinary give and take of social life he laid

no particular stress upon it, but as a commissioned officer in the army of faith he was ready to do his duty if he suspected an attack upon that faith. With Robert Stenning there was more than suspicion to go upon. "He wraps it up in subtle language, and a kind of forced jocularly," he said. "But he's all the more dangerous on that account. The man's an atheist, and if I were you I should have as little to do with him as possible."

With the ground thus prepared for him, Mr. Stenning, ready to find a kindred spirit in Mrs. Hawthorne, entered her presence on that dark winter afternoon and was received with a total absence of cordiality. She did not even shake hands with him, but gave him a stiff bow and motioned him to a seat. Then she whispered to Ruth to go out and tell Jessie to delay the further laying of the tea-table. Mrs. Hawthorne may have begun to shake herself free from some of the prohibitions which loyalty had fastened upon her, but here was a clear issue. With her husband's portrait looking down upon her, she would not suffer this subtly wicked man to break bread in her house. After a few cold words she rose and left the room, and did not return. In a few minutes Jessie came in and told Stephen that the mistress wished to speak to him. Mr. Stenning and Tony were left together.

There was a flush on the cheek-bones of Mr. Stenning's bearded face. "Never mind, dear boy," he said kindly. "We shall meet again some day, though I'm sorry we can't meet here. Perhaps you don't understand what has happened. Many people look upon me as a dangerous heretic, and it's evident that Mrs. Hawthorne is one of them. I ought to have thought of that, and written to say I was coming first. Then she would have refused to see me here, and you would have escaped this unpleasantness. I'll go now, but first let me say this. Don't

make a trouble of it. She won't want to. She's acting up to her lights, and it can't be pleasant to her to have to do it in that way. Let it slide. Good-bye, dear boy; I shan't forget you. We haven't done with each other yet."

He went out, leaving Tony utterly bewildered, and more than a little inclined to cry, if only he hadn't been nearly grown up. But a white heat of indignation began to arise in him, and scorched up the softness that Mr. Stenning's kindness had induced. He must get away from this house; he simply couldn't wait here for them to come in again, and then behave as if nothing had happened. If it had been only Mrs. Hawthorne whom he would have to confront, or Mrs. Hawthorne and Stephen, he would have had it out. He felt himself burning to do so. But he couldn't before Ruth. He must get away from them, for a time at least. If only he could get away from them altogether!

He rushed out of the room, and snatched his hat from the stand in the lobby. He heard voices upstairs and without taking his coat hurried out, banging the door after him. He heard it open when he had also banged the gate of the little front garden, and Stephen's voice calling after him, but he took no notice and went on.

It did not occur to him to go after Mr. Stenning until it was too late; then he wished that he had. He wished a good many other things, among them that that woman hadn't taken away all his money. If he had had the price of his fare on him, he would have gone straight off to St. Leonards to Aunt Bertha—run away, in fact. He had half a mind to run away anyhow. How was he to go back to that house, and that woman? He could walk to St. Leonards in two or three days, and had just enough to pay for food on the way. Probably he was

deterred from this enterprise, which was not without its attractions, by the fact that he was wearing the "topper" and "tails" of Sunday dress. Besides, for all his rage, he didn't want to break up the basis of his life altogether. He only wanted for the moment to be with somebody with whom he felt at home. He would have to go back to Ifield Cottage sooner or later. It was his home now, such as it was. He thought of going to Henry and Laura, but dismissed the idea. He would get little sympathy there. He thought of going to the Hopwoods, but dismissed that idea too. There was nobody he could go to, for solace, either in Hilbury or within reach of it. He was tied to that odious house, like a prison, where he could never be himself, and where his best friends were insulted.

It was very cold on this January evening, and a fine drizzle of rain began to fall. Tony found himself in a street of closed shops in the more crowded region that stretched from the foot of the hill into the heart of London. It was desolate enough, with only a few people about, and nowhere in front of him that he wanted to go to. He began to bethink himself. He had been walking for an hour, and if no longer very cold he was getting wet and was already hungry. Bodily discomfort is a counter irritant to the troubles of the mind. Tony began to think more of how he could get something to eat than of how he could best show his contemptuous displeasure with Mrs. Hawthorne when it should suit him to go back to Ifield Cottage, which was the point to which his reflections had now brought him. He found a coffee stall near a large station, round which there was some life, and assuaged his hunger with not unpalatable food and drink.

After that he was ready to view the occurrence that

had driven him to flee from what was his home in a broader light than he had yet brought to bear upon it. For reasons of her own, Mrs. Hawthorne had been rude—abominably rude—to a friend of his, but that friend, so much more charitable and *really* good than she was, had made excuses for her and bade him take it calmly. He could make no excuses for such behaviour, but he would shame her by a lofty disregard of it. If she didn't know how to behave, he did, and he would show her by his attitude henceforward that he was not a child over whom she could ride roughshod, but a man whom, if she was to get on with him, she must learn to respect.

Well then, perhaps he had better go home and begin. But he was not yet quite ready to do that. It was not much past six o'clock. If he walked all the way back—but he thought he would take a tram—he would arrive at Ifield Cottage when Mrs. Hawthorne, Ruth and Stephen would be at church. Jessie would let him in, and she would have something to say; she would have quite a lot to say. It would be difficult to maintain the attitude of aloof dignity which now seemed called for before her, or at least hardly worth the doing, since it would not impress her, or even stop her tongue. And when they came back from church they would find him there, and what would he be doing? No, that wouldn't do at all. Perhaps the best thing he could do would be to go to church himself. It would be rather effective to tell Mrs. Hawthorne that he had done so, when the reckoning came, of which however he was not in the least afraid, but rather the opposite.

So he paid for his meagre meal, and ventured himself among the currents of foot-passengers, until he found one that landed him at a large, brightly-lit church, which he entered.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END OF IT

THE church into which Tony had found his way was one in which a very advanced ritual was practised, which had the curious effect of preventing any religious appeal that the service might have made upon him, in his wrought-up state, by striking some familiar chord. It was interesting and rather attractive, but curiosity was aroused in him rather than emotion, and it happened that the sermon was didactic and arid, failing to hold even the attention of the faithful, and scarcely listened to by him. Yet he went out of the church in quite a different frame of mind from that in which he had entered it. It was almost as if he had come out on purpose to come to this church, and now that the service was over was anxious to get home again as quickly as possible.

He took a tram to the bottom of the hill and walked up it quickly to warm himself. The rain had ceased and the stars had come out. He rather enjoyed the walk up the hill.

It now seemed to him that he had felt far too deeply something that didn't really matter, since Mr. Stenning had been so kind about it. Mrs. Hawthorne was what she had always been, and it was absurd to have been thinking of adopting any sort of pre-arranged attitude towards her. He would never be able to keep it up; it was far too much trouble, and nothing would be gained by it. He was no longer even very angry with her.

But neither was he afraid of her at all. He supposed

that she would have something to say, and possibly to do, about his leaving the house and staying away all that time, but he made no plans as to what he should say in reply. That was too much trouble too. He only hoped she wouldn't deprive him of his supper, for he was hungry again.

It was past nine o'clock when he knocked at the door of the cottage. Mrs. Hawthorne opened it to him, and he said, without forethought: "I walked down the hill, and went to church somewhere in Tulsington."

She said in her ordinary voice: "I have kept some supper for you," and preceded him into the sitting-room.

He was pleased to see that the supper was not of a penitentiary nature, and that neither Stephen nor Ruth was in the room. Stephen must have been sent to bed before his time, so that Mrs. Hawthorne and he should be alone together. This caused him a faint amusement. Stephen wouldn't have liked being sent to bed at nine o'clock.

There was a moment's awkwardness as he sat himself at the table, before Mrs. Hawthorne spoke. When she did, it vanished.

"I think you owe me some explanation," she said. "You can't remain here as one of my family if you behave in that way."

He hadn't thought of that, but it seemed reasonable enough. Before he could reply she said: "I have been very anxious. I had no idea where you were. Did you go after Mr. Stenning?"

She seemed more human as she said that; and, somehow, still less to be feared.

"I think I should have gone after him if I'd thought of it," he said, beginning his attack on the cold beef, since it was there to be eaten; "but I was so angry that

I just went anywhere. I didn't know where I was going until I found myself at the bottom of the hill."

Some after-taste of his anger returned to him, enough to stiffen him to hold his own, where until now he had only wanted to get it over.

"It is impertinent of you to speak to me like that," she said, "and I am not going to allow it."

What should he reply to that? His mind was working very quickly now. It seemed to him that she was taking an unfair advantage; for he had not spoken impertinently, either in tone or intention. If she was going to stop his mouth, she couldn't be willing to meet his just cause of offence. But he did feel that to sit there tucking into his supper while he explained himself might create a sort of devil-may-care impression. This was not his desire, and he kept his play of knife and fork as unobtrusive as possible.

"I couldn't help feeling angry," he said. "Mr. Stenning is one of my best friends, and I love him and admire him."

What was left unsaid was more effective than if he had spoken it, though it was only not said because the inclination to attack Mrs. Hawthorne was absent from him. She was none the less driven to defence.

She shifted her position a little, sitting on the sofa, as she said: "I always felt disturbed about your acquaintance with Mr. Stenning. I have read his books—one of his books—which is an attack upon religion, and I know the reputation in which he is held, which you cannot know. I wish now that I had said plainly that I couldn't receive him here, but I had no idea that he would come like that. Did you arrange that he should come and see you here?"

"He said he might come."

"Then why didn't you tell me so?"

Why hadn't he told her? It was really because he had hugged the thought of his illustrious friend appearing unexpectedly, and conferring distinction upon him by so doing. But he couldn't give that reason. "I didn't think of it," he said. "He didn't say he was coming for certain. He was very kind to me at Hastings. I told him about everything. He said it was a good thing for me to be living here, and he said he should like to meet you."

He stopped short. He had been going to tell her more of what Mr. Stenning had said, but that announcement seemed a good place at which to stop. He threw a glance at her to see how she would take it, and was struck with her appearance, sitting upright, with no work or book in her hands. He did not define the look on her face as one of irresolution, but felt that she was less formidable than ever.

"What did Mr. Stenning say to you before he left? He went almost immediately I had called Stephen out of the room. It must have been something very remarkable to send you rushing out of the house in that violent way, and staying away for so long."

Oh, so Mr. Stenning had been blamed for it! He hadn't thought of that either. If he had, he could hardly have helped enjoying in anticipation the complete victory that seemed now to be delivered to him. He paused for a moment to consider how he could give his reply full weight. "I never thought you'd put it down to him," he said. "He isn't like that at all. He went away at once because you showed him that you didn't want him here, but he told me that he understood why, and that I wasn't to mind. He was very kind. He *is* very kind, and I admire him more than anybody I know."

Perhaps it was a pity that he had ended like that. It gave her something to answer. There was a flush on her cheeks as she replied: "You have said that before, and I have told you that he is not a man to be admired in that way. You are too young to understand these things, and I am not going to argue them with you. It was an unpleasant necessity to make it plain that I could not have a man who thinks and writes as he does—against religion—in my house, and it was you who brought it on, by not warning me that he meant to come. We had better not talk any more about him. What cannot be allowed is that you should show your temper in the way you did, and act so outrageously. Unless you have some apology, at least, to make for that, I must tell your brother that I cannot keep you here."

Did he want that? His feeling about Ifield Cottage as a home had greatly lessened, but had not entirely disappeared. He certainly didn't want to be dismissed from it in disgrace. He would lose Ruth and Stephen if he were. On the other hand, any change would bring some excitement with it, at his age. But he had no time to think this out, and Mrs. Hawthorne's authoritative air was beginning to have some weight with him. It is an undoubted offence for youth to show temper towards those in authority over it, even if they give cause for it; and that offence he had committed. "I simply couldn't help myself," he said with a shade of sulkiness. "If I'd stayed I should have been rude. I knew that, and I didn't want to say anything before Ruth."

It was the best answer he could have made, short of a confession of wrong-doing, which evidently wasn't to be extracted from him; or if it were, it would have no value. Would she be content with it?

Not without a lecture upon the ill effects of an un-

controlled temper, of which she had been sorry to see the signs in him before. Under the circumstances she should say no more of what had happened that evening, but he must clearly understand that if anything of the sort ever happened again it would be the last time. He was not to talk about it to Stephen. It was to be at an end.

She rose as she said that, and although he would have liked to eat a little more, he rose too, and said good-night to her, as it seemed to be expected of him.

Ever since that night on which she had kissed him after his outburst before Mr. Broadbent, he had kissed her good-night as a matter of course. He did not offer to do so now, and she made no motion towards it. It was the only sign she showed that she had not forgiven him. It is probable that she did not wish to convey that impression, but found it impossible to end it all by offering the solving kiss. She had exerted her authority, but he must have damaged her self-esteem, and reduced her feeling for him below the point of affection. The good-night kiss was not resumed, and Tony never had towards her again the half-filial feeling which had been growing up in him. Its place was taken by indifference. She did not seem the same woman that he had thought her before that evening. He didn't think much about it or about her. She was in the position that a schoolmaster might have held, with whom he was in a relationship that involved constant intercourse but required no tribute beyond a carefulness not to offend. His affection for Ruth and Stephen continued, but she remained outside it.

He felt more cheerful as he went up to bed. Stephen was awake and demanded particulars of him in an awe-struck voice. "I've been to a very high church," he said.

"They had incense, and all sorts of funny clothes. Why did you come to bed so early? Don't you feel well?"

"Don't be a fool," said Stephen. "The mater couldn't make out where you had gone. What did she say to you?"

"She said she was sorry you'd eaten all the beetroot. You're a greedy pig."

Stephen was baffled. Tony might have been expected to come up either resentful or subdued to penitence. This air of nothing having happened was inexplicable. "You gave us a pretty good fright," he said. "Beastly cheek to behave like that to the mater!"

Tony's mood suddenly changed. "She said I wasn't to talk about it," he said shortly. "I don't want a jaw from you. I've had enough of it."

"Oh, all right!" said Stephen. "But you're not going to behave like that to the mater. She's been jolly decent to you."

No more was said between them, but the current of Tony's thoughts was entirely changed. He lay awake for a long time with a feeling of desolation upon him. He did not think at all about Mr. Stenning, nor much about Mrs. Hawthorne. Stephen's words had affected him more than anything that she had said. He didn't belong here. There was nowhere that he did belong any more. If Stephen had offended in the way that he had, under a sense of injustice, there would have been an almighty row, but after it things would have been as before. He might even have expressed his own offence freely, perhaps rudely, but it would have made no difference afterwards. Tony could not have done that; he had had to restrain himself from the attack that would have been his best defence; but the difference was there all the same. It was not the alteration in his feeling towards Mrs. Haw-

thorne that he minded, but the sense that support had been drawn from him. He would have to take responsibility for himself now. Behind the freedom that he had enjoyed at home, and missed so much, had been the protection that had made it possible. The freedom had gone and the protection too. He was alone in the world, but subject to the will of others.

But youth is adaptive, and the ordinary affairs of life absorb time and attention and are solvents of the troubles of the mind. A considerable part of the day was spent away from the cottage, and the spring was creeping on, with daffodil buds showing in the little garden, and the grass of the Field taking on a fresher green. Football had given way to preparation for the Sports, and Tony, with his lengthening legs and his strength coming to him, was in for the Mile, and the Half-mile, and the Hurdles, and filling much of his mind with anticipation. At home life went much as before. It was seldom that it came to him that something had gone out of it.

It was a little awkward with Stephen at first, because of what had passed between them. Stephen was watchful, and Tony had to be careful with him, for it hurt him to think of himself as suspect in his behaviour towards Stephen's mother, whom it was Stephen's duty to protect from rudeness. He did not like meeting Ruth's shocked enquiring eyes either, when he came down the next morning. But Mrs. Hawthorne must have determined to help him over that awkwardness at least, for she treated him as if nothing had happened, and there was no reason either for Ruth or Stephen to look upon him as any longer under displeasure.

Stephen, with his mind lightened of pressure, said something to make him think on the way to school. "I

suppose the mater wouldn't mind my saying something about Mr. Stenning," he said. "You didn't know he was an atheist, did you?"

"He isn't," said Tony indignantly. "If we're not to talk about it, what do you want to say a beastly thing like that for?"

"I didn't mean it to be beastly, old chap," said Stephen, in his conciliatory mood. "I thought it was rather beastly for you, not knowing. I liked him before the mater told me that, and I wasn't surprised that you did. I don't see how you could have told. I suppose he was too decent to let you know."

"I tell you he isn't an atheist," said Tony. "Who said he was?"

"Well, old Broadbeans did. He's read his books, and I suppose he knows, as he's a parson."

"I don't suppose he knows anything about it," said Tony, as they went in under the gate turret in which the bell was ringing. But in chapel he kept his eye upon Mr. Broadbent, who was reading the service that morning, careering through it in the fastest possible manner consistent with the bare recognition of full stops but of no other points of punctuation. So Mrs. Hawthorne had consulted him upon the question! He wondered if she would tell him of Mr. Stenning's visit. But of course she would. Then what would he do about it? It had come to seem natural that Mr. Broadbent, who with Dr. Cookson was the only man who was intimate at Ifield Cottage, should advise upon points where a man's advice was wanted. But was the behaviour of Mrs. Hawthorne's family one of these points? and had she given him, or would she give him, any right to deal in a disciplinary fashion with them? She had said that she should say no more about what had happened; but he might be in

for a "jaw" from Mr. Broadbent. That would be a different matter from dealing with Mrs. Hawthorne.

Tony still had to do with Mr. Broadbent in school, for he had come up to him in mathematics. Tuesday and Friday afternoons were devoted to this. On Tuesday, Mr. Broadbent gave some little special attention to him when he took him some work. It might have meant nothing but that he was in his less gouty condition and disposed to what stood with him for amiability; but there was a subtle sense of personal contact in it which Tony had only experienced with him since he had lived at Ifield Cottage. The change had pleased and somewhat flattered him, and he was apprehensive of a change back to the almost contemptuous indifference with which he had treated him before. Perhaps Mrs. Hawthorne had told him nothing yet.

But on Friday the mildness continued, though Tony had shown up work that might have brought fulminations upon him if old Broadbeans had been suffering from his dreaded malady. "This won't do at all," he said. "You don't seem to understand what you're expected to do. Come to me after tea and I'll explain it. I haven't time now."

He sometimes summoned boys to his house in that way, but it was those whose capacity for mathematics showed unusual promise, whom it seemed worth his while to help on. Tony couldn't flatter himself that he was one of them. It was obvious that he was in for a jaw, but it seemed fairly plain also that it would not be a minatory one. If old Broadbeans had been leading up to it since Tuesday, which seemed probable from his conciliatory attitude, he must have meant to show him that he had nothing to fear. Tony looked forward to the interview with interest.

Mr. Broadbent received him in what would have been the drawing-room of his house if he had not been a bachelor. It was a large room, containing many books, and comfortably if not opulently furnished. Tony took it in with eager eyes, interested in any signs of what it might reveal of its owner's personality outside of what he knew of it. It stated Oxford, with the coats of arms flanking the large photograph of Mr. Broadbent's college over the mantelpiece, which had a row of silver cups on it of the peculiarly inartistic design of the vessels which rewarded athletic prowess in those days. Fancy old Broadbeans a runner! He was a pretty good cricketer now, though not exactly active in the field or between the wickets. There were college groups on the walls, which Tony would have liked to examine, to see what the stumpy bearded figure had been like in his youth. He approved of the general effect, for Oxford meant distinction to him, and it was allowable to emphasize it in after life.

"Now then," said Mr. Broadbent, taking his paper from him, "let's get this over, and then we can have a talk."

The explanation was hardly more than perfunctory. Mr. Broadbent turned round in his chair. "Sit down," he said. "Mrs. Hawthorne has told me about Mr. Robert Stenning's coming on Sunday. I said I should like to say something to you about it. She wasn't willing to have him in her house, and nobody can blame her for it. But it was unfortunate that he did come, and there was no way of getting rid of him but the way she took. It was a difficult position for her, and it may have given him a wrong impression of her."

Tony seemed to be invited to reply. "I think he understood all right, sir," he said. "He said if he'd thought

of it, he'd have written to say he was coming, and then she might have said she didn't want him to."

"Did he? Well, that's a sensible way of taking it. There are a good many people who wouldn't want to have him in their houses, and he must be aware of it. He's a friend of your grandfather's, isn't he?"

"He came to see me once or twice when I was staying there. I first met him here at the Grange."

"Yes, I know he's a friend of theirs. Well, Dare, I don't think you need feel that you're forbidden—by anybody—to continue your friendship with him. He's a man of reputation and in the ordinary way of course he wouldn't obtrude his views—dangerous views I consider them—on those who might be offended by them. He has written good books on other subjects. He needn't be judged only by his anti-religious books. I shouldn't read those yet if I were you. When you're older you'll be able to judge for yourself."

"Thank you, sir," said Tony, not knowing quite what to make of it. It might have occurred to an older person that when Mrs. Hawthorne had consulted Mr. Broadbent he had thought that her repulse of Mr. Stenning had been too complete, and wanted to remove the ill effects of it. Mr. Stenning was not a safe man to offend, and an affront had undoubtedly been put upon him. He had been known to make people who had crossed swords with him look very foolish, in public print. Tony knew nothing of this, but divined that Mr. Broadbent thought that Mrs. Hawthorne had made a mistake, and was trying to put it right for her. He felt grateful to him, if not to her, who might have put it right herself. He would have thought none the worse of her if she had.

Mr. Broadbent had finished with that question, but not yet, apparently, with Tony. "What are you going to do when you leave school?" he asked him.

Tony said that he wanted to go to Oxford, but he thought his brother wanted him to go into his business.

Somewhat to his surprise Mr. Broadbent did not advise him to seize the chance of a business ready for him, as most people did to whom he mentioned the opposing ideas. "I think you might do pretty well at Oxford," he said. "You haven't worked nearly hard enough, and you've missed your chance of scholarships. You could have got them if you had worked steadily, but you can't work up to scholarship form on spurts. Still, you might take a fair degree—a Second, perhaps, if you don't idle altogether."

Tony did not like to tell him that without a scholarship there was not the slightest chance of his going to Oxford. It was a blow to him to hear his chances so summarily disposed of, and a blow that struck home. He realized for the first time that he hadn't any chance; it wasn't in him to keep it up, to recover the ground he had lost. He hadn't even thought about it much lately, so easily were his fervent desires of one moment changed to indifference the next. He listened to Mr. Broadbent giving him the sort of advice about his future that might have been expected from him. Schoolmastering, or the Church, were the lines upon which his ideas chiefly ran, but he touched upon the Civil Service too and a few other occupations to which a University degree might be a stepping-stone. Tony expressed interest in them, but felt none. They were not for him, or at least he could not expect to arrive at them through the channel of Oxford. That was the conviction that the talk settled in his mind.

But he thought it very decent of Mr. Broadbent to take that amount of interest in him, and was won to complete liking of him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SPORTS

THE amicable relations between Laura and Tony had suffered no relapse. Tony had stayed at Estbridge for a night now and then, and she and Henry had come to Hilbury, house-hunting. Towards the end of the Easter term they came on two or three Saturdays running, for a house there had been almost decided upon. It was either that or one at Heathside, not far away, which Henry preferred. Laura and Tony were leagued against him. Henry had some of his father's taste for reading, and was buying books. The Heathside house had a large room fitted with bookshelves, which he wanted for a library; the Hilbury house had a good double drawing-room, but no third sitting-room. Laura's contention was that he didn't want to poke himself away in a room by himself, and it would be better to have the smaller drawing-room fitted with bookshelves; then they could sit there together when they were alone, and if they wanted both rooms for a party, they could be thrown open. Henry boggled at the expense of good bookshelves. Those in the Heathside house must have cost three or four hundred pounds at least, and he would get them practically for nothing. Besides, they weren't going to give big parties. They would never want a drawing-room larger than the one at Heathside for the people who would be in it together.

Tony watched the decorous struggle with interest. It seemed to him that Henry and Laura were beginning to

pull in different directions, and that their one-time frictionless companionship was entering on a new phase. There was a sub-surface acidity to be noticed now and then in Laura's speeches, with which Tony had been familiar enough in his own intercourse with her, but which he had not known her to use towards Henry. Henry seemed to stand much where he had always stood. With a larger income he would be in a better position to gratify his tastes; but his tastes would not alter. Laura seemed to be turning into a different person altogether. In the slight dispute about the "parties" Tony had seen her mouth tighten, which meant that she was going to have her own way about that, though it was not the time to press for it now. He was pretty sure that one of her reasons for preferring Hilbury to Heathside was that it would be easier for her to collect a circle there; and she meant to play her part in it. He prodded her occasionally with reminders of his own ability to bring grist to her mill, but she did not take kindly to that, and the idea that her increased friendliness towards him had had anything to do with his power to work introductions for her faded from his mind. It was enough accounted for by the change in their respective positions, and by the change in his own treatment of her. He had never taken any trouble to win her over before, and he would not have been Anthony Dare if he hadn't accepted the change in her as induced largely by the attentions he now paid her.

Where Henry and Laura came together in preferring the Hilbury house was that it had a much larger garden, and beyond it a view over fields, not so beautiful as the view from Ifield Lodge, but more open than the outlook from the Heathside house. That would probably decide the question, but no decision had been made when

Henry and Laura came up to Hilbury for the School Sports.

This was a great social occasion, and Tony was in his element, released for the time from the confinements of Ifield Cottage, and keeping company with people whom he had had little opportunity of meeting since he had gone to live there. Henry and Laura would be late in coming. When they did come, he had made up his mind, for reasons of his own, that he must identify himself with them; but until then he was free to pick up the threads of his past life. Mrs. Hawthorne was there with Ruth, and he avoided them both. He felt uncomfortable about avoiding Ruth, but presently she detached herself from her mother and went about with Margaret Cookson, and he took a turn with them between the events, and behaved affably to them. He had no wish to confer this favour upon Mrs. Hawthorne. She seemed to be out place in that bright assembly, with her widow's weeds and her stiff repressed air. He had never thought so meanly of her.

It was a sunny Spring afternoon. The grass of the Field was a soft velvety green, the trees round it were budding. It was warm enough for summer frocks—which were not called frocks in those days, unless worn by small children. A band played at intervals in a corner by the pavilion. Tony was exhilarated, and felt that something pleasurable and exciting must surely happen to him soon. He had “trained” enough to be in the most perfect health, and he had distinguished himself early in the proceedings by winning his heat in the Hurdles. He didn't suppose that he would win the Final, but he was assured of at least one prize, which he would receive at the hands of Mrs. Hopwood, who had been asked to present them.

The Hopwoods were there in force, and received Tony as if he were a long-lost younger brother. Captain St. Leger was in attendance upon Maud, who looked very beautiful, and as if she had been grown-up for years. Captain St. Leger's attitude towards her seemed to have changed since Tony had last seen them together. It was almost proprietary, and Tony had little difficulty in supposing them to be engaged, or soon to be so. But he was not jealous on his own account. Maud was far beyond him now, in any Sabrina-like sense, but she was just as friendly as she had always been, and Captain St. Leger was friendly too, and treated Tony with the chaffing indulgence that he liked so much from young men of distinction. It was gratifying to walk about with the handsome couple, to catch the glances that were everywhere thrown at them, and to shine in reflected glory.

Maud asked him to give an account of himself, but he had nothing to tell her that he thought she would want to hear. He had something, however, to ask of her. "My brother and his wife are coming up this afternoon," he said. "I wish you would let me introduce them to you. I want them to take a house here."

"Why, of course, Tony," she said. "I'll tell them that I think you want looking after. Are you going to live with them when they do come here?"

This was a question to which he had as yet obtained no answer. Laura had fenced with it, and he had not liked to press her; nor to ask Henry, who had reverted to some of his former aridity of manner towards him.

"I don't know yet," he said. "I can't unless they do come here, and it isn't certain yet. They may take a house at Heathside."

"Oh, we must stop them doing that. We must have them here, Tony. We *must* get you away from Mrs.

Hawthorne. She looks a regular dragon. Look, Dick! That's the lady who keeps Tony on bread and water, and beats him night and morning—the one in black talking to the little fat man. He is one of Tony's oppressors too, and they say she's going to marry him. Then there'll be two of them."

This speech chased successive emotions through Tony's mind. The fear that she would make a wrong opening with Henry and Laura was obliterated for the moment by the significance of her addressing Captain St. Leger as "Dick"; but that lost interest in the momentous prospect opened by her coupling the names of Mrs. Hawthorne and Mr. Broadbent. It did not, however, occur to him at the time as anything more than a ridiculous rumour. He laughed, and said: "Mr. Broadbent was a friend of Mr. Hawthorne's, and of course he's a friend of hers. I say, Maud, you mustn't say anything to Henry and Laura against Mrs. Hawthorne, or about me living with them. Just be nice to them, and say they will like living in Hilbury much better than at Heathside."

"All right, Tony, I'll be as nice as I know how."

"And that's nice enough for ordinary purposes," said Captain St. Leger.

Tony was a little anxious about the appearance that would be presented by Henry and Laura, but he was reassured when they came on to the ground. Henry looked neither well-dressed nor ill-dressed, but there was nothing about him that need cause an aspiring relative any uneasiness. Laura seemed to him to be very well dressed. Tony had known that she was taking more interest in her clothes than before, and probably spending much more money on them. He had given her a little judicious chaff about doing him credit on this occasion, and had known by her reception of it that she would be anxious to dress

the part; his only fear was that she might overdress it. But she had not done that. She was still partly in mourning for his father, and her clothes were quiet enough, but looked distinguished. He thought he had never seen her look so nice, and was not at all ashamed of taking her up to the Hopwood party and introducing her as his sister-in-law.

The Hopwoods happened to be standing in a group, and Tony found, somewhat to his surprise that Fred Hopwood and Henry were already known to one another, and had something to talk about a little apart. But he was more interested in the impression that Laura would make, for so much hung upon it. Laura might hold herself superior to any idea of being influenced by such people, but on this particular day they were on a pinnacle, and if they accepted her in a friendly way she was certain to be pleased by it.

It all went very well. Mrs. Hopwood was a large, rather vague woman, whose general impulse was to make herself pleasant to everybody. Maud must have prompted her, for she seized eagerly upon the way presented to her of making herself pleasant to Laura.

"I hear you are thinking of settling down in Hilbury," she said. "I do hope you will, if you can find a house. We have found it a delightful place to live in."

Laura was evidently gratified. Tony watched her while he was talking to Maud, who showed a disposition, now that she had done what was expected of her, to move away, which she presently did, in company with Captain St. Leger. By that time Mrs. Hopwood and Laura were getting on very well together, and it seemed to Tony that it was only a question of time now for the Hilbury house to be decided upon.

When Mrs. Hopwood began to show a roving eye, indi-

cating that, agreeable as this conversation was, she was ready to exchange it for another, Tony steered Laura tactfully away.

Laura was careful to give no sign of having been impressed by Mrs. Hopwood or flattered by her attentions. She said in a half-patronizing way that she seemed to be a nice sort of woman; but Tony was not taken in by that air. He was glad that Laura had been able to hold her own, but he knew that she had put forth an effort to do so. His ear had caught differences in her inflections while she had been talking to Mrs. Hopwood. She had borne herself with a natural air, but it had not been quite natural to her. He was about to press for a final decision about the Hilbury house, when Morton Hopwood came after them to say that there was to be an early supper at the Grange after the prize-giving. His mother had sent him to ask if she and her husband would come, and bring Tony.

This was doing it handsomely, and Tony was all agog. Those jolly informal suppers at the Grange, at which there always seemed to be room, and food, for an infinite number of people—they, and the games and the dancing that came after them, were the best in the way of social experience that he had ever known. To have Laura and Henry invited to one of them was more than he had hoped for at this early stage, and would surely bring about all he wanted.

Laura hesitated, and he felt impatient with her. He did not reflect that if her desires were such as he had credited her with, an informal gathering would be less to her taste than a formal; for it would not be sociability that she would prefer, but dignity. Morton overruled her objection that she and her husband had to get home to the other side of London. Other people had to get

back to London too, he said; that was why they were feeding early. They could go as soon as they liked afterwards. Then she said that she must ask her husband, but Tony said that Henry was sure to say yes, and pressed her to do so beforehand. "Tony knows we keep it pretty bright," said Morton. "We're hoping to see a lot of him this summer—and you too, if you come to live here."

So then she consented, but told Tony when Morton had left them that he had rushed her into it and she wasn't at all sure that she wanted to go, or whether Henry would want to. But her protest was devoid of annoyance, and he knew that she was pleased with the invitation.

Tony was anxious to get it settled up with Henry and with Mrs. Hawthorne, to whom Laura had not yet spoken. Henry was still talking to Fred Hopwood. They were at the other end of the Field, where there were few people, walking to and fro together, as if their conversation was of some importance. It suddenly struck Tony that this was rather odd. What were they talking about? Had it anything to do with him?

But Laura said that they had lately met in business. It was partly to see Fred Hopwood that Henry had come up this afternoon, and she dared say that he would be glad of the invitation to supper, for they might want to go on talking, though for herself she didn't believe in mixing up business and pleasure.

They went down towards them, and when they got within earshot Henry said: "Mr. Hopwood has kindly asked us to supper after the prize-giving. I said I was sure you'd be glad to go."

Fred made himself pleasant to Laura for a few minutes, and then said to Henry: "Well, I think we've

pretty well settled everything; we'll get it fixed up on Monday. I must go and do my duty by my mother now."

He hurried off, and the three of them followed more slowly. Tony discovered that he had not been included in Fred's invitation, so it could hardly have been of him that they had been talking so seriously. Henry did not at first consent to asking Mrs. Hawthorne if he could go. Tony considered him to be rather above himself; he had put on the slight pomposity which had been so annoying in him in the past. If it was owing to satisfaction at having come into close contact with Fred Hopwood, Tony had known him long before Henry, and was inclined to resent it. He asked Laura whether she had said anything to Mrs. Hawthorne about Tony's going, and when she said that she had not spoken to Mrs. Hawthorne yet he expressed surprise, as near to displeasure as he was likely to go before Tony. "We've been here for an hour," he said. "She will think it very discourteous that neither of us has taken any notice of her."

"I don't care for Mrs. Hawthorne," said Laura stiffly. "I'm quite ready to be polite to her when I'm with you, but I see no reason for seeking her out on my own account."

Henry made no reply, but went straight to where Mrs. Hawthorne was standing, talking to Mr. Cookson this time.

She greeted him and Laura with her usual unsmiling self-possession, but Dr. Cookson, with Margaret hanging on his arm, had a great deal to say to them. He had heard that they were thinking of taking "Danefield," which was next door to his own house. If he might give them a word of advice it would be to snap it up. He had

had it from the agents that some people had been to look at it the day before, who seemed to want it badly.

"We have practically made up our minds to take it," Laura said; but Henry wouldn't commit himself. "I have the option of it until Monday," he said. "We shall decide one way or the other to-morrow."

Mrs. Hawthorne made no difficulty about Tony going to the Grange, but asked that he might be in by ten o'clock.

"Oh, we shall be going long before that," Henry said. "He can come away with us."

Why did Henry make himself such a killjoy?

CHAPTER XXVI

PROSPECTS

TONY's presage of something exciting about to happen to him was justified; and it all happened very quickly. The excitement would have been aroused, at his age, by almost any unforeseen change, if it had not been conspicuously for the worse, and although this change closed for him the path he had wished to tread, he welcomed it when it came.

School broke up in the week after the Sports. Tony had been going straight to St. Leonards, but Henry wrote and told him to come to Estbridge for a night first, as he had something particular to say to him.

Tony vented his annoyance before Stephen over this summons. He had been eagerly looking forward to the holidays, and had fixed upon an early train to take him to St. Leonards in the morning. He was going to enjoy himself there thoroughly, and didn't want his arrival put off for an hour, much less for twenty-four. But he had some curiosity about what Henry had to say to him. Perhaps it was that he was to live at "Danefield," which Henry and Laura had now determined to take. They were to move as soon as possible, and expected to get in before the end of the holidays. But if that was it, why shouldn't Henry have written to him? Or Laura? Laura had been tiresome about it. He didn't know even now whether she wanted him to live with them or not.

There had been a slight drop in the temperature of Tony's feelings towards Laura. She had gone a good

way towards spoiling his pleasure in the supper-party at the Grange, which but for her would have been as enjoyable as any he had known there. After all, in spite of her good beginning, she had shown herself out of place in that bright, and it must be confessed rather noisy, assembly. Her primly genteel ways had set her apart, where everybody else was natural and free-spoken, or, if taking no active part in the talk that was bandied to and fro, content to smile and listen. Even Henry had done that, and said afterwards that he had enjoyed himself. But Laura seemed to think general talk and laughter indecorous, and, if there was any attempt to bring her into it, that people might be laughing at her. She must defend herself by keeping up a tepid conversation of her own, and, as her right-hand neighbour, after allowing himself to be taken out of the general current once or twice, and being thoroughly bored by her, returned to it with determination, she fastened herself upon Tony, whom she had asked to sit next to her, and showed offence if he withdrew his attention from her at all.

Tony did his best. He was sorry for her, for it was so evident that she was out of place, and his inclination was to defend her from comment. But she insisted upon taking Henry away almost immediately after supper, just as they were beginning to dance in the picture gallery, and of course Tony with him. And she had no idea that there was any lack in herself, or if she had, would not acknowledge it, but criticized the company she had left, and showed herself out of humour generally. That must have happened before, because Henry showed himself capable of dealing with it. He was at his best—kind and indulgent, wooing her back to good humour; but, though Tony respected him for it, he couldn't help feeling annoyed and impatient at the conversation between

them, in which there was no part for him. He had been dragged away from all the fun an hour or more before the time at which he need have come. And what an exchange! He had to walk slowly, because of Henry's limp, and listen awkwardly to their adjustments. They had taken him away, but they didn't want him, neither of them showing that they thought it worth while even to address him. He had been happy and completely at home with all those kind and amusing people at the Grange. They were the sort of people to whom he really belonged, and he could always get on with them and make new friends every time he had the opportunity. Henry could just hold his own, on the few occasions on which he came into contact with people outside his own walk in life, but Laura couldn't even do that, and of course she was annoyed because she knew she had been a failure, however much she might try to keep up her end by criticizing them and their ways.

Still, he would have to live in closer contact with Henry and Laura now, whether he stayed on at Ifield Cottage or went to them at "Danefield"; and it would be through them that he might expect to get more freedom during the summer term. It wouldn't, in any case, be the happy freedom that he had enjoyed at Ifield Lodge, but it would be awful if he were to be confined as he had been during the last two terms, with all the summer sociabilities of Hilbury passing him by. They could save him from some of that, and it would be worth while to make the best of them on that account alone.

As if to remind him that there were two Lauras, with one of whom he had got on very well of late, he had a letter from her on the evening before his last day asking him to meet her at "Danefield" in the morning. He could help her to settle certain things there, they could lunch

in London and go to a concert afterwards, for which she had taken tickets, and get home in time for dinner.

This relieved him of hanging about with Stephen, with nothing much to do, instead of taking the first day of the holidays as an opportunity of seizing his freedom as soon as possible. Laura did understand that a holiday was a holiday. She had shown it before; and she was capable of enjoying one herself too. Oh, there were certainly two sides to her, and the better of the two was obviously in the ascendant again. There was something, after all, to look forward to on the first day of the holidays, and not the least exciting event would be the visit to "Danefield." It would almost certainly be decided now whether he was going to live with them or not, and if so there would be plans to make on his own account—his room to be settled, and perhaps the decoration and furnishing of it. With Laura in an acquiescent mood, there was nothing to which she might not be persuaded.

He could not keep his anticipations to himself, as he and Stephen retired for the last time to their bedroom. Stephen seemed rather under the weather. He was not of an envious disposition, but he would much have enjoyed a seaside holiday, instead of staying at home and making his own amusements. Tony always seemed to have the best of it, he said, grumbling good-naturedly; but he did not take his evident desire to get away from Ifield Cottage altogether with the same absence of real concern. "Of course it will be much jollier for you in some ways," he said. "You'll have more room, and a garden with a tennis court; and I suppose you'll be able to go out more. But we've had some good times together, haven't we?"

"Oh, yes, rather," said Tony. "But you'll come to 'Danefield' just as you used to come to Ifield Lodge, if I go there."

He asked Stephen to go to "Danefield" with him the next morning, but Mrs. Hawthorne had arranged something else for him to do. Probably she didn't want him to intrude himself upon Laura uninvited, but there was nothing in her manner to indicate that this was in her mind. Tony was glad to be going away from her, but he had no antagonistic feeling towards her at the moment, and said good-bye to her in a spirit of friendliness. He was only coming back to pick up his luggage, for Laura was going to drive him into London. Mrs. Hawthorne would be out when they came, and asked him to apologize to her for it.

It was not until Tony said good-bye to Ruth that it came to him that there was something that he had had at Ifield Cottage that he would not have at "Danefield." It was not exactly Ruth herself whom he would miss, or not only Ruth. It was Ruth and Stephen too, and, incredible as it might seem, a little of Mrs. Hawthorne. There would be no family life at "Danefield," to compare with what he had had at Ifield Cottage. He said good-bye to Ruth with some emotion, and felt that he had been rather a beast in wanting so much to get away.

He was a little before his time at "Danefield." He couldn't get into the house, but wandered about the garden, which was in an unkempt state, but gave promise of something attractive to be made of it in the way of suburban gardens. The house was semi-detached, the garden divided from Dr. Cookson's by a thick growth of lilacs, laburnums and mays. The upper part was mostly taken up by the tennis lawn, and there was a fair-sized kitchen-garden beyond it, and beyond that hayfields. Henry would have something to amuse himself with, and it was a great thing to have a full-sized tennis lawn. Tony hoped that he would be allowed to ask his own

friends to play upon it. It wouldn't be much fun to pat balls about with Laura. Henry had usually beaten him hitherto, in spite of his lameness, but he hoped to alter that in the coming summer. Of course it wouldn't be so good as Ifield Lodge, but it would not be altogether unlike his life there. It would be a change, anyhow, and a change for the better.

He had made up his mind by this time that this change was coming to him, and Laura confirmed it at his first question. "We thought you would like it better," she said, "and there are reasons why—er— Well, you will hear everything from Henry, all in good time."

So there was something else to be told him; but he could not get from her what it was, though her good humour was proof against his pressure.

And his mind was taken off by the interest of going round the house, and making arrangements with her about it. She had assigned to him the smallest of four rooms on the first floor, which looked on to the road in which the house stood, and the test of his skill with her was to get it exchanged for a larger room on the floor above, with a view over the open country.

"Oh, do say yes, Laura. I shall be able to have all my books here, and my writing-table and everything. It will be like being at Ifield Lodge again. Do please, Laura. It will make such a lot of difference to me."

She wouldn't say yes, but she didn't say no, and her attitude inclined more to yes than no. If he could keep on the right side of her until it had to be finally settled he thought he would get it; and he divined that keeping on the right side of her in this matter meant taking it as a favour to be received at her hands, instead of a question that had something to be said for it on both sides, but more on one side than the other. Still, he didn't

mind that as long as he had his own way, and he was determined to get it sooner or later.

She seemed almost to have given way when it came to choosing papers, which had been brought to the house for her inspection. They had an amicable dispute about the one for the room that Tony wanted. "I was going to choose quite cheap papers for this floor," she said. "But in case I do decide to let you come here, you may as well have your own choice, and I'll go to two shillings a piece instead of ninepence. But mind, Tony, you're not to take it as a promise."

Tony had quite recovered the holiday feeling when he and Laura arrived home about six o'clock, and found Henry already there. He had already gained something by having his journey to St. Leonards put off for a day, and he had his early start to look forward to on the next morning. It remained to be seen whether what Henry had to say to him would add to his anticipations of pleasure, or detract from them.

Henry was in his business-like mood, and invited him to a conference upon the instant. "May as well have it out now," he said. "Then we can have a pleasant evening together."

Tony was a trifle dashed by the phrase "have it out," as he followed Henry into the dining-room; but he couldn't charge himself with anything that Henry could take exception to in his recent conduct, except possibly the affair with Mr. Stenning; and he was prepared to defend himself about that, if Mrs. Hawthorne had been making complaints.

"Laura has told you," Henry said, "that you are going to live with us when we go to Hilbury. It isn't convenient for Mrs. Hawthorne to have you any longer, and it fits in all right now that you should come to us."

"I'm glad I'm coming to you," said Tony; "but I didn't know that Mrs. Hawthorne wanted to get rid of me. She has said nothing to me."

"No. Well, I suppose she wouldn't have said anything to me, if she hadn't been obliged to. She just wrote that she was expecting to make changes that would prevent her having you with them any longer. Haven't you heard anything?"

What Maud had said at the Sports flashed across Tony's mind. He had not thought about it since. "Do you mean Mr. Broadbent?" he asked.

"Hopwood said that it was thought they were going to be married. Haven't you heard that?"

"Only from Maud; but I didn't think anything of it."

"Perhaps it's only a rumour. But if it is going to happen it would explain what she meant by saying she expected changes. Hasn't Stephen said anything about it?"

"No, not a word."

"Perhaps he doesn't know. However, it's none of our business, and we needn't bother ourselves about it. Only your not being able to be there any longer fits in with what I wanted to talk to you about. I've just fixed up a new Agency. It ought to be a very good thing for us. I wasn't quite sure about being able to work it entirely myself, so I took it to Hopwoods, and we are going into it together. Now I don't see that there's much to be gained by your staying another term at school, when you were going to leave anyhow this year. It would be a good time for you to come into the business now. I should put you on to this new Agency chiefly, and you would learn it from the start. What do you think about it?"

What Tony thought about it was quite different from

what he would have thought a few months before, about being taken away from school before the summer term and set to work in the City. The idea struck him most favourably. He would be his own master, within limits, and would be earning money. The work would be new and probably interesting, and the great thing about it would be that it would not be done under that sense of doubt and anxiety which had lately returned to him over his school work. He had not seldom envied the young men whom he had seen going off to the City when he and Stephen had been going to school, some of them hardly older than himself. They were going to work, but when their day's work was over they were free of it, and hadn't to think of preparing for the following day, with trouble coming of it if their work wasn't well done. At a stroke he would be one of them, emancipated, a man and no longer a schoolboy. He did not think of all this at once, but the picture of the young men going off to their untroubled work in the not too early morning rose before him as Henry asked his question, and he said at once: "I should like it, Henry. When would you want me to begin?"

"Well, it all fits in very well," said Henry again. "We shan't actually be taking up the work for another week or two, and there's no reason why you shouldn't have your holiday first. Of course you won't be getting anything like the holidays you've had at school, but in the ordinary way I should have let you have most of the summer holidays, as father did me when I started. If you have three weeks or so now, and a few weeks later on, it will come to the same thing. I shall be glad to have you with me, Tony. This makes it just right. If there had been two of us, I needn't have shared this with Hopwoods. Still, I don't regret that, because I think

it will be a good thing to be in with them, and they will probably put things in our way now, which will make it worth while in the long run."

Tony was gratified by Henry's expression of pleasure at having him with him, but hardly began to see his future as a responsible partner in his enterprises. You went into business and did whatever there was to do and made money out of it. You began with a little money and worked up to have more. As yet he was entirely without the sense of values or the vision of opportunities which go to make success in commerce, and would scarcely have recognized them if he had seen them. Probably Henry had begun with no better mental equipment, but he had acquired the commercial sense, and seemed to have increased it since he had stood on his own feet. There was already a difference in him, which Tony felt, even if he did not recognize its source. Henry had become like a schoolmaster whose knowledge of his subject was to be taken as absolute. He had not seen him in that light before. Fred Hopwood, in some vague way, he had come to consider a master of his subject, and Henry and Fred Hopwood were now on equal terms.

"Did Fred say anything about me coming in now?" he asked.

"Yes. I told him I was thinking of it, and he said he didn't think you would do much more good at school, and it would be a good thing for you to begin now. You'll have to work, you know, Tony. There's more competition than there was when I started, and there will be more still by and by."

"Oh, I shall work all right," said Tony. "I like work, if it is something you can get on with. Will the new business mean longer hours at the office?"

"Oh, no. It will be in working order by the time you

come in. Some days there will be more to do than on others. It might mean an hour later, occasionally. You ought to be there about half past nine, and you'll generally be able to leave at five. You'll get your Saturday afternoons, and perhaps a day off every now and then for something special. But not often. I don't want to treat you differently from the other clerks; it wouldn't be fair."

"Oh, no," said Tony.

"As for salary, I'll give you what father gave me to begin with—five pounds a month. You ought to be able to do on that. I'll pay for your season ticket too, and of course you'll have no expenses for living, except your lunch."

It sounded like affluence—over a pound a week, when he had been getting a shilling. He turned over many things in his mind, all pleasurable, as Henry went on to talk about the new Agency he had acquired, full of new pleasure himself at the success with which he had pursued his object, overcome difficulties, and landed his prize. It was curious that Tony, so ready to take fire from ideas put to him, should have felt no particular interest in the recital, or thrown himself forward to a time when he would play a similar part himself. He did venture to ask what the profits of the new business might be expected to be, and Henry, in his satisfaction over his coup, told him, as he might not have done at other times. He said that his share ought to be about a thousand a year, and might come to be more. Tony did think then that it was a good opening that he had been given, and that he would have been a fool not to jump at it. The old business going on, and the new one to provide that substantial addition to its profits! Henry must be richer now than his father had been, and by and by Tony would

share in his riches. In the meantime life ought to go pleasantly enough with him. He was almost inclined to regret that he wasn't going to start off at once; but his coming holiday would be all the more enjoyable since it was to end not in a return to the bondage of school but to this new life of his manhood.

With Laura, most of the talk was about "Danefield," and what was to be done there. Now that there was no secrecy to be observed over the future, she allowed herself to make plans with Tony over the course of life there. She thought that they might have a regular evening for tennis, at which their friends, and Tony's friends, would be welcome, with supper to follow. "Not of course in so *grand* a way as the Hopwoods do it," she said. "There is only one court; and besides we shan't know so many people, at least at first."

Henry thought that it would be better to ask only a few at a time to begin with. But Henry didn't seem to have his mind much occupied with such matters. He retired to the dining-room again soon after dinner, and busied himself with his papers. "Henry is becoming a real old money-grubber," Laura said. "He hardly ever used to bring work home before."

"It's rather jolly, his getting this extra business," Tony said. "You must be quite rich now, Laura. I suppose you could really afford to live in a bigger house than 'Danefield' if you wanted to."

"There's a good deal to pay back," said Laura, in her voice of primness.

Tony didn't know what she meant, and didn't ask her. He had other things to think about.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN END AND A BEGINNING

TONY had seldom been happier than when he travelled down to St. Leonards the next morning.

It was a bright Spring day. The wind was racing across the country, chasing the light clouds before it, sunshine and shadow dappling the wide prospect which opened out when the range of chalk hills above Sevenoaks had been passed, the wooded floor of the Weald, after the long tunnel, carpeted with flowers. Tony, alone in his carriage, sang with pleasure, as he took in the happiness and gaiety of it, and sent his mind forward to what was coming to him.

Henry had given him a sign that had recognized his new status. It had taken the form of a five-pound note, but it was not so much the money that pleased him as the way in which it had been given to him.

"You'll be on your own in a good many ways now, Tony," Henry had said. "I shan't want to be directing you in everything. You'll be living with us, and you'll do your best, I'm sure, to make it a pleasure to us to have you, as you can very well. You'll have more freedom than you could have had if you had been staying on at school, and you may as well begin now and get used to being responsible for yourself. This ought to cover your holiday, and give you something in hand when you begin work. You'll have your screw at the end of the first month, but if you want something to get on with I'll let you have it. You'd better try, though, to arrange

your affairs in such a way as not to want any advance in the second month."

Tony had hardly been prepared for this sort of consideration from Henry, whose tendency had always been towards bossiness and criticism. He felt more reliance upon Henry's new attitude towards him than upon Laura's. Henry might still show himself bossy and critical upon occasions; it was in his nature. But it was evidently his intention to treat Tony upon fraternal terms, and he had taken some thought about showing it. Well, he should have his return. The few words he had said about Tony's living with them had struck a responsive chord. It was in his power to add to the satisfactions of their home life, and of course he must try to do it. Other people liked to have him with them, and why shouldn't they? Henry had been good in thinking about him in this way. It would make a lot of difference to have this coming holiday belonging to his new state of independence, sufficiently supported, instead of to the old state of pupillage, and it wasn't everybody who would have thought of it. He didn't think that Laura would, though Laura had shown herself kind too, in her own way. He would have to be careful not to arrange for too many of his pleasures apart from them. It was a slightly different view of life at "Danefield" from any he had hitherto had, that he would be partly responsible for its success, and not only a sharer in whatever suited him in it; but he was capable of accepting it, under the influence of Henry's welcoming words, and did so, as far as he thought beyond the immediate present.

That present filled him with pleasure. He felt towards his aunt and his grandfather as to no one else. They would be interested in anything that was going to happen to him, and pleased with his pleasure. He greatly looked

forward to being with them, and could hardly control his impatience as the none too speedy train rattled and lingered its way through the warm Sussex country and brought him at last within sight of the sea.

He walked from the station, leaving his luggage to be brought on by a porter, by which he would save a few shillings. This was the first prompting of economy in the handling of his own money, and brought with it a sense of virtue, easily aroused in him.

It was extraordinary how he had come to like this place, and to feel that he was coming home to it. It was all so agreeably familiar, the walk down the steep street on to the sea-front, the long line of tall houses, the pier, the two old-fashioned rows of shops on the parade itself, the great expanse of water sparkling in the sun, the fresh salt-smelling wind. It was better than Merstead, at least at this time of the year. He was lucky to have such a place to come to for his holiday, and Golly! as Stephen would have said, how he was going to enjoy himself in it!

His welcome was as warm as he had anticipated, and the interest in his news as great. His grandfather thought that it was rather early for him to leave school, and hoped he would keep up his classics; otherwise it seemed a splendid opening for him, and no doubt his brother had been wise in his decision. Miss Barrett took it as his first step on the ladder upon which his father had risen. "I've often thought," she said, "that business men are better off than professional men in the general way of things. They don't have to work so hard all through their lives, and they get more for it. I'm sure it's a great chance for you, Tony, and we shall see you Lord Mayor of London some day."

"I shouldn't care so much about that," said the old

man. "I would rather be Dean of St. Paul's. I once went to a service at St. Paul's Cathedral when the Lord Mayor and the Aldermen were there, and I thought they didn't show up very well beside the Dean and the Canons. There was not so much evidence of thought in their faces. But it must be very nice to make money, and to be able to buy books, and to travel, and to help other people. Your dear father used his money wisely, and I hope you will do the same, Tony."

Tony went to see Aunt Charlotte in the afternoon. She received him ecstatically, and showed herself deeply interested in his news. "I told Henry," she said, "when I last went to London, that he ought to take you into his business and give you a good share in it. He laughed at me, and said there was plenty of time to see about that. But I am glad to hear that he has taken my advice. Henry has a good heart. Laura hasn't."

"Did you see Laura when you went to London?" Tony asked.

"Yes, I did, Tony. I did see Laura." She nodded her head, with meaning.

"Why do you say she hasn't a good heart, Aunt Charlotte?"

"Never you mind, Tony. My eyes are sharper than I'm given credit for. Very polite. Oh, yes! Worth taking some trouble about, you see. Money to come. But it don't deceive *me*. However, we'll say nothing more about that. Plenty of other things to talk about."

"Well, I must say that Laura has been very decent to me lately. I'm going to live with her and Henry, you know, so I may as well make the best of her."

"Now that's what I like about you, Tony dear. You *are* so ready to make the best of people. Oh, by all means

make the best of Laura. Yes, you make the best of Laura, Tony dear. It wants making, and I'm sure you're the one to do it."

Tony laughed. There seemed to be something for him yet to hear. It was odd that nothing had been said to him about a visit of Aunt Charlotte's, in the course of which she had seen Laura. Henry had sent her a perfunctory message of greeting; Laura hadn't mentioned her name, though she had sent her kind regards to Mr. and Miss Barrett.

Nothing, however, came out that morning, but Aunt Charlotte asked Tony what Henry was going to pay him, and when he told her she said decisively: "Not enough."

She said it so promptly as to show that she would have said it anyhow, whatever sum he had mentioned. "Oh, I've nothing to grumble at," he said. "It is what father gave Henry, when he began. I suppose I shall have more by and by. I shall only be learning, you see. Henry is treating me very well."

She commended him for that statement also. It seemed that he only had to refrain from adverse comment on both Laura and Henry to earn praise, which was grateful to him. But though he didn't care much whether she kept up her antagonism to Laura or not, he thought it was incumbent on him to see that justice was done to Henry, and spoke up in his defence. Aunt Charlotte nodded her head, and repeated at intervals that it did him credit. But evidently she was a little "off" Henry for the moment, and as she seemed to be so pleased with Tony himself he did not carry his defence to undue limits. The subject faded from his mind as the days went by. Nothing new could have happened, he thought, as she seemed to be more disinterested in Henry and Laura than actively hostile to either of them. She liked making little

mysteries about nothing at all. When he said good-bye to her a few weeks later, she gave him a handsome present, and told him not to let Henry put upon him. Until then she had hardly mentioned his name again.

Tony had been at St. Leonards a week, thoroughly enjoying himself, but beginning to feel that some accent was wanted in the easy flow of his days, when Miss Barrett gave him a surprise which also brought a considerable pleasure.

"I've had a letter from Mrs. Hawthorne," she said. "Did you know she was going to be married—to Mr. Broadbent?"

"Then it's true after all!" Tony exclaimed. "I've heard it said twice, and forgotten it each time. Fancy—old Broadbeans! Then he'll be Stephen's stepfather! I wonder how old Stephen will like that. Why did she write to you about it, Aunt Bertha?"

"She wants to know if I can take Ruth and Stephen in for a fortnight. They were going to some relation, but there's chicken-pox in the house, and she has to make some other arrangement at once. You would be glad to have them here, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, rather! Can you manage it?"

"I think so. I can put a bed into your room for Stephen, if you don't mind, and there's a room upstairs that isn't used. I will ask for the loan of it for Ruth. I will see to it at once, and send a telegram."

She made her arrangements, and afterwards she and Tony had one of those intimate friendly talks which so attached him to her. She had always talked to him as it were upon equal terms, which had been possible because she had just put aside subjects that could not be treated in that way. But as he grew older, the distance between them lessened, and during this visit she left off

treating him as a schoolboy altogether, and they talked over many things which they would not have touched upon before.

"I'm glad for her sake," she said, "that she has found a good husband. It was sad that she lost hers when her children were so young. But she has brought them up well, I imagine, on a very limited income, and I should think they would benefit from the change."

"It's funny to think of her as Mrs. Broadbent," Tony said. "He's an angry old thing, but a lot of people like him. I do rather myself. He was decent to me about Mr. Stenning. I can't say that she was. Still, I've forgiven her."

"It was a difficult position for her, Tony. I didn't say much about it when you told me, but I've thought it over. From all I've seen and heard of her, she wasn't really made for that very strict sort of religion that her first husband followed. You might say she didn't quite understand it. She kept the strictness, and the rest of it didn't touch her. I've seen many cases of that sort, and I think for ordinary people, though I wouldn't say this to everybody, a more work-a-day religion is the best thing. I shouldn't wonder if your Mr. Broadbent hadn't brought her to some feeling of that sort, and she'll be a nicer person as Mrs. Broadbent than she was as Mrs. Hawthorne."

This illuminated some of Tony's feelings about Mrs. Hawthorne. "I've never thought about old Broadbent as religious at all," he said. "It's a funny business altogether. That's the second marriage of old men lately that we've known about, though of course Mr. Broadbent isn't as old as Sir James. Do you ever hear from Merstead now, Aunt Bertha?"

He would not have asked the question, at least with that significance, a few weeks before, and if he had she probably wouldn't have answered it.

"Yes," she said. "Mr. Gandish writes to your grandfather sometimes, and Mrs. Gandish to me. They both seem anxious to keep up any work that we began there, and they seem to be doing very well. More people come to church than used to. Mr. Gandish is a good preacher, and of course in all those years they had got so used to grandfather's sermons that it isn't to be wondered at that they like something fresh. Sir James and Lady March come to church regularly. She has a lot of new clothes, and looks very well in them. Mrs. Gandish isn't above giving me a little gossip, and I'm not above receiving it."

Tony laughed. "Tell me some more of it," he said. "I have heard once from Nanny, but she only said that things weren't as they used to be at the Rectory, and she didn't mention—er—Alice at all."

"You'd better get out of the way of calling her Alice. Sir James is very particular about her being treated with the utmost respect. Poor girl, she's hardly allowed to see her own people at all, except Tabitha, who is being trained to be a lady, and is to live with them when she leaves school. Sir James has quarrelled with most of his neighbours because they haven't called upon her. He has set up his carriage again, and gone back to something of the way of living that there used to be there. Mr. and Mrs. Gandish go to the Hall more often than we used to. I suppose they are about the only gentlepeople who do go there now, and are asked on that account. Sir James seems to be treating her well, and is very fond of her. But what a life—shut away in that great house with only

that old man to keep her company! I should say she was paying very dearly for the pleasure of being called 'my lady.' I'm glad we are out of it."

Stephen and Ruth came down on the afternoon of their mother's marriage. Tony met them at the station, more excited at the prospect of seeing them again than he would have thought possible. He had been happy enough in the company of his elders, and had picked up with some of the friends he had made during the Christmas holidays; but it would be jolly to go about with these two, and there were things that he wanted to hear. He and Stephen had not written to one another. Stephen would have something to tell him, and he was not without the desire to exhibit himself to his friend under his new character of a man of affairs for the moment at large.

Ruth looked subdued, and as if she might have been crying. But she looked unusually nice, in a new coat and skirt, and a new hat, and smiled upon Tony as if she was really pleased to see him. Stephen was his usual blundering grinning self, but talked more continuously than his wont, as if he were anxious by surface conversation to avoid immediate reference to what was in the minds of all three of them.

"Golly! You do look a swell!" was his first speech to invite reply. Tony had bought himself some stick-up collars, then just coming into fashion, and a tie-pin, and a pair of light dogskin gloves, and a walking-stick with a staghorn handle. He felt himself well-dressed, in an entirely grown-up fashion, but although he wished to create that impression he also wished it to be taken for granted, and felt slightly annoyed at Stephen's exclamation. Stephen, of the same age and height as himself, could not have been taken for anything but a schoolboy, with his bowler hat down over his ears, and his overcoat

rucked up at the neck. There was already a great difference between them, but Stephen, as usual, was unabashed by any difference that pointed to his own inferiority. Still, it was nice to see the old thing again, and Tony had become just a trifle tired of playing the man.

It was not until they were alone together that Stephen talked about what Tony wanted to hear. They went up to their room, and Tony sat on his bed while Stephen unpacked his clothes. The April evening was drawing in, and the lights were coming out along the parade and on the pier, while the tide was dragging the shingle beneath them.

"I say, this is ripping!" said Stephen, taking a preliminary look out of the window. "We weren't on the front the last time we were here, and I like it much better. I'm jolly glad we came here instead of going to Croydon."

He turned away. "You see you couldn't have come back to Ifield Cottage after all," he said.

He was introducing the subject. "I suppose you are all going to live at Allenby Lodge," said Tony.

"Yes. I believe Ifield Cottage is let already. I shall be sorry for some things."

"It will be rather jolly to live in one of the Houses."

"Yes, for some things. But I shall have to look out."

Tony understood. Stephen would be in a curious position in Broadbent's House. And there was an ordeal before him. The marriage had been kept very dark. It would arouse all sorts of curiosities and comments from Mr. Broadbent's unabashed pupils.

"They'll be all right to you, old chap," he said. "What are you going to call him?"

"I'm to call him Mr. Broadbent in the family circle," said Stephen, picking up. "With the *hoi polloi* I shall call him Broadbent. I shan't be able to indulge in 'old

Broadbeans' any more. He's been very decent to me. I don't think he cares for me much, but he puts up with me."

"Do you mind very much? When did you know about it?"

"I had a sort of feeling at the end of the term, but I wouldn't believe it. It was he who told me. The mater told Ruth. Oh, I suppose it will be all right, but—"

"But what?"

Stephen hesitated. "You see I've always thought of me growing up to look after the mater and Ruth. And now— Well, I suppose it will be all right. He'll be jolly decent to her."

"You like him, don't you? I do. I don't believe you're right in saying he doesn't like you."

"I don't say he *dislikes* me. But of course I'm not ornamental. I dare say he'd rather have had you."

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"I don't know whether he won't want to interfere."

"Interfere in what?"

"I've been sort of working it out for a long time what I'm going to do."

"You never would tell me what you wanted to do."

"Because I haven't made up my mind. But I'm going to make up my *own* mind, when I do make it up."

"He talked to me about going to Oxford and being a schoolmaster or a parson."

"I dare say he'll talk about that to me too. But I'm not going to be a schoolmaster, whatever I am. I don't mind telling you that. I'm going to do what I think father would have liked. He was a much finer man than Broadbent, and I'm his son. I'm never going to forget that. Well, don't let's talk about it any more. We're going to enjoy ourselves here at any rate, and I dare say it will be all right at home when we get used to it."

“Does Ruth like it?”

“Oh, I suppose she’s rather puzzled. But he’s very decent to her. He’s fond of Ruth. I think she’ll score in some ways. I say, he’s given us each a sov to spend here. I vote we go to the Baths to-morrow, you and I.”

The last days of Tony’s holiday passed as if on wings. He had never so much enjoyed Stephen’s company. He had never had it before away from the shadow of Mrs. Hawthorne’s repressions. He had never thought of Stephen as being much affected by them, but he seemed to be growing in stature now that he had himself to look after. He had always been thoughtful for his mother, but that might have been considered imposed upon him. Now he was thoughtful for Miss Barrett and the old Rector, in a way that seemed to come natural to him but was none the less pleasant to see. Tony was inclined to feel ashamed of his own easy complacencies when he saw Stephen putting himself out to keep the old man company as if that were exactly what he wanted to do; he might have felt jealous of the liking Stephen inspired if his nature hadn’t been fairly free from that debasing passion.

With Aunt Charlotte, Stephen was not so much called upon to show himself obliging. She had a way of rewarding everything done for her with bullion, which Stephen confessed to Tony made him feel awkward. “She’s jolly decent,” he said, “but I don’t care about being tipped quite so much. It’s all right for you.”

Aunt Charlotte adored Ruth, who was the first young girl she had had a chance of making a fuss over, at least for many years, and she liked Stephen; but obviously she liked Tony much better. Stephen knew it and grinned about it. “There’s no doubt you’re the boy,” he said.

"You do her credit. You go along with her and twirl your cane. I'll follow up with the pug-dogs."

Tony went back to London a few days before Ruth and Stephen. On the night before his departure he and Stephen swore a new compact of friendship. It came to both of them that their ways would diverge from now, more than they had hitherto thought of. Stephen was uncertain about his immediate future, not unhappy about it, but not happy either. Tony's satisfaction in his was in abeyance for the moment. His holidays were over, and his school days were over. He would not have chosen to go back to them, but felt dimly that he might come to regret them. It had seemed a great thing to pass to the dignity of manhood, but there was a different kind of freedom belonging to his former state which had come to an end for him. Stephen would have that for some years to come.

But these half-regrets disappeared when he had said good-bye, and was on his way to London. It was exciting to be going back to "Danefield," concerning the progress of which Laura had written to him. She had nearly finished her furnishings and decorations, and was sure that he would be pleased with them. He was to have the room that he wanted, and it would be all ready for him when he came.

He arrived home at about the same time as Henry, and the evening was spent in arranging books and hanging pictures. The house was even nicer than he had anticipated, so bright and clean, and so convenient for the life that was to be lived in it. Laura had shown a capable hand in making the very best of its opportunities, and Henry was pleased with all she had done. So was Tony. He had more of a sense of possession in his own room than he had had at Ifield Lodge. Most of the things in

it were his very own, and he made plans for adding to them. Certainly he ought to be happy here, with the summer coming on. He had not forgotten that he was to make himself a valued member of the household, but it would be nothing of a task, with both Henry and Laura so nice to him as they were showing themselves, welcoming him home as if they had really wanted him to complete their satisfaction in their new surroundings, and treating him no longer in any way as if he were subject to them.

The next morning he went into the City with Henry, dressed in a tail coat and a silk hat, like any other season ticket-holder, and reading the "Daily News" which he had bought because he had half made up his mind to be a Liberal.

Mr. Richards and Benson shook hands with him when he entered the office, and said that he looked brown. Within a few minutes he was sitting on a high stool at the long desk under the skylight, filling in Bills of Lading.

THE END



